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Lurid Confessions

No. 1



Hard - Hitting
Hot Stuff! by

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LURID CONFESSIONS

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Number One

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SCANDAL SHEET

Psst! Did you hear the latest? Cryptic Publications is actually putting out a confession mag! And come to think of it—this is it! Yes, you have somehow sunk so low as to purchase a copy of *Lurid Confessions* #1. Tsk, tsk.

The wide versatility of pulp authors is well known. For example, Robert E. Howard, most famous for his *Sword-&Sorcery* tales of Conan, also wrote westerns, boxing stories, spicy adventures, detective stories, and weird menace yarns. Or take Carl Jacobi, master of the macabre; he also penned tales of the South Seas, weird menace and science fiction. But did you know both of these authors tried their hand at stories for *True Confessions* magazine? Neither was too successful, but we think their attempts deserve to be made available to their many fans and collectors. Like the typical spicy story, you will find that confession tales written for the more inhibited 30's get better, at least funnier, with age.

Carl Jacobi's "I Model My Soul" was submitted to *True Confessions* but bounced in 1931. Robert E. Howard's four yarns show some variety and are not, most of them, without a dash of the fast-paced action characteristic of his fiction. Of these, only one, "The Curse of Greed," has appeared in print before, in *Fantasy Crosswinds* #1 about ten years ago.

Another rare treat awaits you when you finish the vicarious thrills provided by Jacobi and Howard. Those who chanced to read F. Gumby Kalen's memoir "Lovecraft as I Seem to Remember Him" (*Crypt of Cthulhu* #14) may recall Kalen's surprising revelation that HPL, too, wrote for the confession magazines under the transparent pen-name Sally Theobald. Much checking with pulp collectors has turned up a copy of one of these tales, "I Wore the Brassiere of Doom." You will have to admit that Lovecraft could cover his tracks when he wanted to. But for Gumby Kalen's information, it is a safe bet this work would never have been identified and restored to its rightful place among HPL's oeuvre.

Finally, Will Murray sheds some light on a neglected aspect of our genre: those hybridizations of weird fiction and confession yarns *Ghost Stories* and *True Strange Stories*.

Dear reader, after telling the sordid tale behind this issue, we've learned the error of our ways. No more issues of *Lurid Confessions* from us! How could we have been so foolish! (In other words, we hope you enjoy the one and only issue of *Lurid Confessions*.)

Robert M. Price
Editor

I MODEL MY SOUL

by Carl Jacobi

It was a glorious moonlight night when I decided to leave Tender River for once and for all. The little village nestling between dark hills was silent in slumber as I crept to the gate and headed quickly down the walk to the railway station. My wrist watch showed five minutes of twelve. In five minutes I would be free, speeding toward a new life and happiness.

Happiness—the word seemed to shout at me like a hidden voice. Happiness, the one thing which no one in this slow-moving town knew or understood. How could they when life for them was only a monotonous chain of drab events with each day exactly the same as the one before?

I had lived in Tender River all my life. Raised and cared for by my spinster aunt after the death of my parents, which had occurred when I was too young to understand, my world had been confined almost entirely to the town limits. I had been held in check by a cold woman. Nothing had ever happened to me, nothing at all. I was sick for excitement. But most of all I was sick for love and romance.

"But there is romance here, Martha," my aunt had said a hundred times if she had said once. "You don't have to travel far to find a boy who loves you. There's Paul Duncan . . ."

"Paul Duncan," I had cried heatedly. "Paul Duncan, a grocery clerk. The son of a grocer."

"But he loves you, Martha. And he may not always be a grocery clerk. He's studying to be an engineer."

"He can study all his life if he wants to," I had replied. "I want to get out of here. I want to go some

place where life is really worth while. I will too some day."

And now I was on my way. No one had seen me leave the house. Not until morning came and Aunt Lucy found my brief note on her dresser would she know the truth. By that time I would be far away.

I shall never forget that night. The separate incidents which occurred between the time I boarded the night train and my establishment in the city have long since merged into a single memory, of course. But those hours seemed like the slow opening of a doorway to a new world. I felt as if at last I had thrown off a great weight which had always kept me from the happiness and the romance I sought.

In the city I went first to Madge Fuller's apartment, after locating it with some difficulty. Madge had been one of my school-girl companions. She had left Tender River two years before and now, I knew, held down a job as chorus girl in a local stock company. She had written exciting, fascinating letters of her dancing work, of the many rich "boy-friends" she met and her usual night life which to me was but a vague dream.

I rang the apartment bell twice before Madge answered.

"Martha!"

She stared at me, pulled me inside and burst into a storm of questions. Later, much later, after we had talked, and I told her what I had done, she arranged a bed on a day-couch, and I fell into a nervous sleep.

That was the beginning of it. I was just a curious moth then moving

in for my first look at the flame. I didn't realize that fire, attractive and magnetic as it may be, has also a faculty of burning those who fly too near. The next months were crammed with activity. Madge took me from shop to shop, helped me select new clothes. She always laughed amusedly at my plain choices, threw them aside, and advised something which to me seemed to suggest the flashy.

"You want something to make you look hot, old girl," she smiled. "Something that will make the Johnnies sit up and take notice. And by the way, we'd better tie a can to that handle of yours. Martha sounds too much like cows and pasture. I'll call you Blackie. You know, on account of your dark hair."

So as Blackie I was introduced backstage at the Ascot Burlesque theater. Madge had learned of an opening in the back row of the chorus and finally succeeded in getting the manager to grant me an interview. He was a big man with fat, sensuous lips and leering eyes. He looked me over from head to foot without saying anything for a long time. Then he told me to stand on a chair and raise my skirts. Finally he nodded, relit his cigar, and said:

"Okay, I guess you'll do. Report for work Monday."

It was strange this throwing myself into a new life, but I was thrilling to the excitement of it. There had been diversion of sorts in the town from which I had come—had been for others, that is. Aunt Lucy had always watched over me like a hawk, however. She had kept me from doing all the things I wanted. Now, as I had expected, things began to happen. It took me some time, of course, to become used to the daring costumes I was given to wear in the theater, just as it took time to accustom myself to a different male escort almost every night after the show. But with Madge's help I began to learn the ropes.

Within a month more I had been dined and danced by Phillip Plante, who was a banker's son, Floyd Brown, to whom money seemed only something to spend, Vernon Akely, Stephen Harris and many others. I learned to accept the back-breaking routine of my chorus work and follow it without rest by more dancing—personal dancing—at some night club until the early hours of the morning. I learned to drink, too, which was something I had never done before.

And finally one night I met Jose. Jose Alvarez was his full name, and the moment I gazed upon his sleek black hair, his handsome, Latin profile, I knew that that romance for which I had been searching had come at last. He was Spanish, he said, the son of a noble Castilian family, and like his father and his father before him, he lived to paint.

We were sitting at a table in a far corner of the Club Figaro when he said it, and I felt my pulse quicken and a warm glow course through me. The lights were low. Up front the orchestra was playing the Carioca, and out on the floor two performers, dressed in Spanish costumes, were gliding back and forth to the lilting cadence. The music seemed to reach me from far off as I looked at him and listened.

"You are beautiful, Senorita. Your beauty is that which I have been searching these many months. I can never hope to do it justice, of course . . . but will you not pose for me?"

My fingers trembled as I reached for the water glass, lifted it to my lips and sipped a little of the liquid. Was this at last the romance, the color I had been waiting for? It must be. Seated before me in the half light Jose seemed the essence of glamour. His black eyes looked into mine, lingered over my body, seemed to probe my very soul.

And yet I was on my guard. The careful warnings Madge had pounded into me night after night held me

cautious.

"You want to paint me?" I asked.
 "You want me to be your model?"

"I do, Senorita. Accept, and I will paint as I have never painted before."

He talked on and on, describing the costume I would wear—it was to be a Spanish dress sent to him recently by his own sister in Spain—describing the pose that would show me to best effect. And somehow when he left me that night and gave me an passionate good-night kiss I knew I would consent.

After that I saw less of Madge Fuller, went with her to less parties. Occasionally, of course, the four of us, she and two "male escorts," took in a night club or so. But gradually we drifted farther and farther apart, and I found my time away from the theater taken up almost entirely by Jose.

He had a studio in the Bohemian quarter, furnished only as a man of his type could furnish it. The outer room was a heavenly place, half masculine, half artistic, with soft, hidden lights, heavy maroon drapes, fine etchings on the walls and rich furniture. The inner room, his workshop, was fitted with a large skylight that covered the entire ceiling.

"Senorita!" he cried in surprise the first time I came to his door.
 "Senorita, you have come!"

He took me in his arms, held me close while I laughed nervously. A delicious feeling of mad excitement seized me, seemed to lift my head lightly like a draught of old wine. I longed to have him kiss me, and when he did, I made no resistance to his embrace. He kissed me again, then held me off at arms' length and gazed at me.

"Come," he said. "I must paint at once."

Ten times during the next three weeks I visited Jose's studio. Ten times I posed for him while he stood gracefully before an easel and worked

with his brush. I knew without fully knowing why that I was treading dangerous ground, that I was playing with fire, deliberately exciting a person I didn't know or understand. Yet the rest of it had captured me full force. At intervals Jose would stop his work and murmur:

"What eyes, Senorita. How can I ever hope to copy them in oil?"

And with the heavy crimson shawl draped over my Spanish dress and the high mantilla in my hair, I would smile back and motion him to his work. For in my heart I thought I had found my first and only love.

Only once was I led to suspect horribly for one brief passing moment that I was wrong. It was just as my hour of posing was ending for the day, and Jose, stepping forward, helped me from the pedestal. He seized me then and began to rain kisses upon my lips feverishly. Something—some thing in the way he held me and in the strange look in his eyes made me push him away and step quickly backward.

"Jose!" I gasped.

But the look in his eyes passed quickly, and the smile which supplanted it quickly disarmed me.

My eleventh visit to the studio I postponed. The night before I had returned home from the theater with a splitting headache. All through the following day the headache continued, and by afternoon I felt strangely tired and ill at ease. Madge recognized the symptoms at once.

"Overwork," she said, giving me two aspirins and a glass of water. "You've been stepping a little fast, and you'll have to take it easy for a spell. You'll be all right shortly, but if I were you I'd give up that Mexican."

"He isn't Mexican," I snapped, "and you know it. He's Spanish. I'm going to marry him one of these days."

Madge started to reply, and I could see a frown of anxiety on her face. But her thoughts remained unspoken.

At that moment the door bell rang, and answering it, my room mate found a uniformed messenger boy.

"For you," she said a moment later, handing me a telegram. "Hope it isn't bad news."

I read that yellow sheet of paper twice before I offered to reply. Then I folded it slowly, laid it on the table and swallowed the aspirin.

"It's from Paul Duncan," I said. "You remember the blond boy back in Tender River. He's coming to the city to look for an engineering job, and he wants to know if I'll meet him at the station tomorrow morning."

I slept but little that night. A week ago a message from my old hometown boyfriend would have only brought a laugh to my lips. Now, influenced perhaps by my exhausted condition, the thought of him made me wonder.

It was true we had had good times in the past. Paul and I—parties, skating, swimming, dancing. Paul was undoubtedly handsome, yet so different from Jose. In the darkness of the room I found myself comparing them.

"It's foolishness," I told myself. "Bringing all this up again. Paul belongs to a drab past, a past I want to forget."

But I couldn't forget. I thought back to my high school days when Paul had always been my lunch companion, to that glorious autumn day when the two of us had hiked far up the river valley. The sun had been like gold then, the frosted leaves a riot of color, and as we rested, listening to the murmuring river, Paul had taken me in his arms and asked me to be his wife.

Next morning the headache was gone, but the tired feeling remained, and I went through my dance routine at the theater with the greatest of efforts. Jose met me at the stage door, but again I put off going to his studio.

"I'm done up, darling," I said. "I've got to rest a bit. Madge says

so, and she should know. Nerves and overwork, I guess."

For a moment as he walked along at my side he said nothing. Then he looked at me queerly, reached in his pocket and drew forth a little glass vial.

"Take a couple of these tonight before you go to bed," he said, dropping two pellets into my palm. "It's just a harmless prescription a doctor once gave me, but it will fix you up right away."

All during the walk to my apartment I wondered about Paul Duncan. What would he think when he arrived and found I was not there to meet him at the station? Would he assume I was married? Would he try to find me?

It was queer how his face kept re-appearing in my thoughts. "A grocery clerk," I muttered to myself. "Why should I waste my time on a grocery clerk?"

Reaching the apartment street door I opened my purse and fumbled for my key. Something drew my eyes to a tall figure standing in the darker shadows beside the lighted entrance. The figure came forward and spoke.

"Hello, Martha."

I felt a nervous chill run up my spine and my cheeks flushed hotly.

"Paul," I gasped. "Paul Duncan, what are you doing here?"

He smiled. "Just got in town this morning. I wired you, but I guess you didn't get my telegram. Can't we go somewhere and talk?"

I said nothing for a long minute. The man who stood before me was a ghost from the past. How could I be cordial to him? I, who had been a play-girl, working man for a good time, and he who was so good and so unsophisticated? In one agonizing moment my present life seemed suddenly a cheap thing covered with colored tinsel. Then I thought of Jose, dark and handsome Jose, and my mouth grew hard.

"I'm sorry, Paul," I said. "I can't see you tonight. I can't see

you ever. Good night."

I left him standing there dumbly and climbed the stairs to the apartment. Inside I swallowed the two medicine pellets Jose had given me, tried to put everything out of my mind and went to bed.

It was the first good night's sleep I had had in a week. Morning, and I felt like a new person. A strange electric glow seemed to course through my body. My head felt wondrously clear.

Yet by night, after the theater performance was over, the old languor returned with double strength, and I could barely drag myself to the dressing room.

Jose was at the stage door, and again he pleaded with me to come to his studio and continue my posing. Against my better judgment I consented.

In his work-room he moved across to a wall cabinet, mixed a martini and offered me the glass along with two more pellets from his vial.

"The first dose made you better, didn't it?" he asked. "You must keep taking it, Senorita, until you are well again."

Just what happened that night is still vague in my mind. I remember stepping up on the pedestal, clad in the Spanish costume. I remember watching Jose before me. And I remember noticing as through a fog the strange, almost animal-like glint in his eyes.

Then suddenly the room lost its proportion. The walls began to whirl in a blaze of colored lights. I felt myself falling.

When I came to I was lying on a couch in a darkened corner of the room. The shawl had been removed from my shoulders, and one strap of my low-cut dress had fallen over my shoulder. Jose was bending over me. Even in the gloom I could see that his eyes were wide and dilated, that his lips were twisted in a sensuous smirk.

His hand moved downward. As in a dream I felt him unfasten the hooks of my dress. Then a bomb burst within me.

I pushed him backward and leaped to my feet. With a frightened cry I seized my hat and coat and raced to the door. Down the long hallway, down four flights of stairs I fled to the street entrance.

There I stopped sobbing. And there Paul Duncan was waiting for me.

"I followed you, Martha," he said simply. "I waited here until you came out. Come, I'll take you home."

That was all. He said no more, and I made no answer the long way back to the apartment.

I saw no more of Jose after that for three weeks. He did not appear at the stage entrance, he did not call, and I avoided that section of the city in which his studio lay.

One thing puzzled me. The tired feeling and the headaches continued. In the pocket of my coat I found the full vial of the same tablets which Jose had given me on two occasions. He had slipped them in my pocket the last night I had seen him.

Hardly realizing what I was doing I found myself on several occasions opening that vial and swallowing one or two of the pellets. A harmless compound, Jose had labeled them. But they did bring results.

Each time I took them the headache and the tired feeling miraculously disappeared. Each time a strange feeling of exhilaration came over me.

I took the pellets at frequent intervals unconsciously shortening the interval between each one. Then one day I saw that the vial was empty.

Panic seized me. The very thought of continuing my strenuous work at the theater without that magic formula seemed ghastly. There was no label on the vial, so it was impossible to have it refilled by any druggist.

I fell into a spell of despondency. My nerves became on edge. Several times when one of the girls at

the theater asked me a simple question I flared into a rage for no reason at all.

At last I could stand the strain no longer, and I decided I must go to Jose. The moment the final curtain was rung down that night I hurried to the dressing room and without even waiting to remove my grease paint, headed for the studio.

Jose had been drinking heavily. I realized that at once, as he stood there swaying in the doorway, face flushed. But his smile quickly stopped any fear I might have had.

"Senorita," he said thickly, "I have been counting the hours until you would come again. I have a thousand apologies to make to you. I . . ."

"Never mind that," I replied. "You remember those small white pills you gave me once, the pills in a vial? I must have more of them. I must, I tell you."

He opened the door wider and drew me in. "Of course, Senorita," he said. "You may have as many as you want. And then, I beg of you, you must pose for me."

I took three pellets this time, and the effect came almost instantly. Jose stood beside me, holding the water glass, watching me with that constant smile.

And now suddenly as that medicine began to reach into my vitals that feeling of recklessness and abandon returned once more. A hot flush came to my cheeks. I could feel my lips burning, my heart pounding.

Jose led me behind the dressing screen, drew a chair forward.

"Just one more pose, Senorita," he said. "You will do it for me, I know."

"But the Spanish costume," I objected. "I wore it home that night . . . the last time I was here. You haven't . . ."

"You will not pose as a Spanish girl this time," he smiled, "but as a Grecian goddess. I want to paint

you undraped with only this silken robe covering you."

For an instant I was silent while the weight of his words sank in. Then I nodded impetuously and stood up.

"All right," I said. "I'll be with you in a moment."

He left me alone behind the screen, and I stood with my thoughts. Slowly I started to unhook my dress. It was madness, what I was doing, yet some deep inner feeling urged me to go ahead. The thought of posing undraped did not trouble me so much. Heaven knows my costumes at the theater were scanty enough. But to pose alone before this man in his semi-intoxicated condition was a different matter. Twice before I had had a quick view into his character. The shock I had received had not left me. But the effect of the pellets was fast drawing away my restraint. A curious thrill of anticipation rippled along my spine. I could feel the flush in my cheeks mounting.

And then suddenly I had that unexplainable feeling of being watched by hidden eyes. I whirled. Directly across from me, half on this side of the screen, half exposed to the room, was a long wall mirror. And in that mirror I could see Jose in the middle of the chamber, gazing at me by way of the reflection.

He was leaning against a chair, half-filled glass in one hand. His eyes were wide open, gleaming with expectancy. His lips were twisted in a lustful smile.

In a split second all the glamour I had seen in the man disappeared. I saw him then for what he really was.

"Oh God," I cried, "what have I done?"

I snatched my wraps, and came out into the room proper. With eyes of granite I looked at Jose.

"I'm leaving," I said. "Leaving this instant. Don't you dare follow me."

For a moment he looked at me in

sheer surprise. Then a bestial scowl came to his face, and he lurched forward.

"Running out on me again, eh?" he snarled. "Just who do you think you are, to treat me as your mood demands? You're staying here."

"I'm leaving," I cried, fighting to keep a sob from my voice.

"You're staying here."

With two awaying steps he crossed the intervening space between us and seized me. One arm fastened itself about my waist. The other pushed the hair away from my forehead, as he slowly bent me backwards.

I fought like a caged tiger. My fingers clawed at his face. Desperately I twisted. The smell of hot whiskey swept into my nostrils.

With a frantic lunge I escaped him and rushed madly for the door. Before I could pull it open he was upon me again, lifting me bodily, carrying me to the couch in the far corner of the room.

And then something happened. The door behind me burst inward. A voice knifed through the air. Paul's voice. Paul Duncan. He stood there in the threshold, his tall figure erect as a Viking.

The next two minutes were a horrible dream. Like animals at bay the two men faced each other for a brief second. Then they rushed forward. Paul shot out his right fist, deliv-

ered one mighty blow. The Spaniard reeled backward, slumped to the floor and lay still.

I spent the next two weeks in a sanatorium, recovering my strength. Every day Paul came the moment the doors were open for visiting hours and stayed until the nurse gave him his hat and smilingly pushed him out. But although I lay there in the hospital bed with the smell of medicine on all sides, I knew for the first time I was at peace with the world.

We spoke little about what had happened, Paul and I. Jose, of course, was arrested and convicted for peddling narcotics. It was dope of some kind he gave me in the medicine vial, and it was that which had put me in his power. The artist studio he maintained only as a blind to conceal his operations. Paul had suspected him from the first, and heaven be thanked had followed me that night when I left the theater.

Finally came the day of my release. As we walked out the door into the morning sunlight Paul leaned over and kissed me.

"Where will we make our home, darling?" he asked. "In which part of the city? I saw a dandy cottage in Lincoln suburbs, and . . ."

I shook my head. "Take me back to Tender River," I said softly. "That's where I belong, Mr. Husband."

THE CURSE OF GREED

by Robert E. Howard

Two years ago I was happy and prosperous; an honored and respected citizen, a Christian gentleman, a proud husband and father. Today I am a penniless felon, reft of all that life held dear to me. I have reaped where I sowed; the fault has been mine and in my wilful blindness, I have pulled down in my downfall others who were more to me than life itself.

Let me tell my story so that others may take heed and profit by my mistakes. If I can save one man or one woman from the pitfalls of ruin I will be content.

I was a prosperous wholesale dealer in Dalville, a town on the shores of Lake Michigan. While my business was small in comparison to the huge wholesale houses, it was remunerative and I was the sole owner. I had built it up from a tiny market and I was proud of it. Alas, too proud! I had a canning factory and bottling works and my exports were remarkably large considering all things.

And herein I made my greatest mistake. I devoted too much time to the mere piling up of money; I neglected the finer and higher things of life. I had a noble wife and two wonderful children—a boy and a girl. At the time my story opens, Jack was twenty and Joan was eighteen. I loved them devotedly and planned great careers for both, but I fear that in my plans for their material good, I was prone to neglect the spiritual side. Their mother used to hint at this, but I merely smiled. I also smiled at her urgings for me not to lose myself entirely in my business interests to the point of forgetting the purer and better things. I could not see her

point. I was one of the pillars of the church in Dalville, insofar as monetary considerations went, for I made large donations to all causes sponsored by the church, and I occasionally attended church myself.

But alas, I made the mistake so many men make all the time; I could not understand that the mere giving of money will not suffice. When I should have been on my knees asking my Creator for a humble and contrite heart, I merely gave another hundred or so toward the building of an annex or new Sunday School room and considered I had done my full Christian duty. Alas, alas, may God in His infinite justice and mercy forgive me! Giving the money was all right, but I withheld my soul, even as I thought that I gave it. Oh, my friends, let my sad case warn you! Not by the gift of gems or gold or graven images may you serve your God, but in humbleness and a weak and contrite heart!

But in my pride in those days I never thought—God help me, I did not know. It was an evil day in my life when Salvator Scarlatti came to me.

There had been some trouble at the factory. The hands were restless and though they were drawing remarkably good wages, they were talking of striking. A larger concern had cut badly into my business, and two large retail houses, formerly regular customers, had transferred their business to my competitors. I was harassed and worried.

Scarlatti was shown in; he was a dark evil-faced man, with a crooked scar on his cheek. I had never heard of him, but he came directly to the point. He wanted me to go in with

him in his "business" and that "business," God help me, was bootlegging.

Oh, it seems incredible now, that I should have even listened to him; that I should not have kicked him out of my office with loathing and horror. But I was blind in those days. All around me I saw men of otherwise blameless lives trafficking in strong drink. Like many others, I, while a total abstainer from all forms of intoxicants, believed the prohibition law to be a bad one. Then, I needed money badly. Scarlatti pointed out the advantages to me; he swore that he wanted my help only to run one boatload of whiskey from Canada. He had the boats and the liquor, but he had nowhere to store it. I had warehouses on the wharves and, more, he pointed out that with my name for uprightness and personal integrity, there was no chance of suspicion falling on me. Alas, alas!

I did not fall at once. I told him to give me a day to think it over. That night my wife saw I was distraught and asked me why I was worried. I laughed and made light of her fears and joined the children in their innocent crowd.

I say children, because to a loving parent, an offspring never really grows up. When I looked on the lithe form of my son, with his eager handsome face, and when Joan put her soft childish arms about my neck and kissed my careworn brow, the sight of their purity and innocence should have swept my heart clean of evil ambitions, but I could only think, in my blindness, that my deal with Scarlatti would enable me to give Jack a thorough course in civil engineering in the largest university available, and that Joan could be sent to an exclusive women's finishing college. Alas, that earthly ambition and false pride should blind our eyes to the higher things of life. Truly, truly, they have eyes but cannot see. I hardened my heart and determined to go through with it.

The next morning my wife must have seen an evil determination in my eyes, for she spoke to me anxiously, begging me, if I had any problem which was troubling me, to put my trust in the All-Highest and bring my cares before the Throne on humble and penitent knees. My guilty conscience made those words irritating and I answered her brusquely and so saying, went down to my office and told Scarlatti that I was ready to go through with our deal. I told him, however, that I would have nothing to do with him after this one affair.

Everything went through according to schedule. Alas that it did! I would that Scarlatti's boat with its vile cargo and viller crew had been sent to the bottom of Lake Michigan and that I myself had dropped dead rather than what happened. Because when I saw how easy it seemed, and how much money we received for so little effort, my heart was sorely tempted and the black fiend of greed rose in my heart and drove out all other thoughts. I agreed to make one more deal with Scarlatti.

The whiskey was brought over in the night from the Canadian shore and shifted aboard one of my own boats. Then in broad open daylight, it was boldly unloaded at my docks and stored in my warehouse. Of course, the bottles were in cases and boxes labeled merchandise, soft drinks, salmon and the like.

And so little by little I fell under the evil spell of illicit trade. We became partners, Scarlatti and I, he lurking in the background and doing the dirty work while I masked our lawlessness with my good name and my reputation for integrity. We prospered in our vile trade. Night upon night the run-runners stole from the Canadian shore to meet my freight boats and load them with their vile cargo. Day by day these freight boats boldly warped up to the docks and discharged their harmless-looking freight which was piled in my ware-

houses—raw material for my canning factory and bottling works, so I said!

Then at night the stuff would be carefully distributed around over the country and the tainted money thus gained would flow into the hands of myself and my criminal partner. Meanwhile I had enlarged my house, Jack was in Harvard and Joanata very exclusive girl's school. But my wife could not understand our sudden prosperity and she was suspicious of it. But I put her off and refused to confide in her for I knew with what horror and loathing she would look upon my dealings. To whitewash my soul, I doubled my contributions to the church, but in my heart I felt that it would do me little good in the end.

Then Scariatti came to me, and he was worried as I could readily see.

"They're hijacking our trucks," he said angrily. "That Dutchman Harger and his thugs. We lost a load of whiskey last night and that cuts down the profit. And it's getting harder to get the stuff out of Canada. We ought to go in for beer; there's lots of money in it. We could make it in the factory—"

But I set my foot down. I would have nothing to do with anything like that and I made Scariatti see that if it was suspected that I was in the game, all would be up with me. Our greatest security lay in the fact that no one ever thought of linking me with anything illicit.

"Anyway," said Scariatti, "I'm putting armed guards on the trucks. And I've got a scheme for cutting down the expenses, too."

I did not ask what his scheme was for his words worried me. With rival bootleg gangs hijacking us, it meant bloodshed and my own blood froze in my veins at the thought. Why, I would be as much a murderer as the man that fired the shot if there was a killing on either side. But I felt that I was too far in the water to wade out now, and I was afraid of Scariatti. I had come to realize his utterly

ruthless nature and in my selfish greed and fear I hardened my heart even as did Pharaoh of old.

So when news came of night fights and brushes with rival gangsters and with the officers of the law, I closed my ears and said nothing.

Well, Christmas came. It had now been nearly a year since Scariatti and I had formed our nefarious partnership. With the coming of Christmas, our orders were doubled, because, were shame to a Christian nation, many men consider that they must celebrate this holy occasion by swinish intoxication.

My children were coming home for the holidays. We were preparing a great social event to be held at our home. Scariatti asked me with a crooked grin if I wanted him to send a case of extra fine Scotch whiskey up to my house for the event and I turned on him in anger. I told him in no uncertain terms that no liquor had ever come into my house, that neither of my children drank and so far as I knew, none of their friends. He merely grinned evilly.

Well, the social was in full swing when my wife came hurriedly to me.

"John, Jack hasn't arrived yet and I'm worried. One of the boys said that he saw him in Portsmouth yesterday and he said he was stopping for the night with a friend, but would be home early this morning. He hasn't come. What shall we do?"

"I'll drive over to Portsmouth right now and see about it," I answered. "I'll bring him back in the roadster. I haven't seen him for months and I'll be glad for a chance to talk to him alone for awhile."

So saying I put on my overcoat and hat and started out. In the hallway I halted. Joan was talking vivaciously to a group of youngsters as I came up behind them, and I saw a pocket flask being passed from hand to hand. I was shocked to see Joan drink with the rest.

I called her aside and said, "Joan,

I am shocked! I had no idea that you drank! What would your mother say?"

"Now, dad," she said, pinching my cheek and laughing, "don't be old-fashioned! All my set drinks a little—we don't get drunk. It's the style. And anyway, dad, you never told me it was wrong!"

With her large innocent eyes fixed upon me, I realized with a sickening feeling that it was true. I had never warned my children against the pitfalls of the world, simply because in my greed for wealth and position, I had never taken time—had never stopped to think. I started to begin a long lecture when suddenly I was struck dumb as if an invisible hand was laid across my mouth. How could I preach, with a worse guilt on my own soul?

With a knife of pain cutting my heart, I turned away without a word and plunged into the night. Outside, one of Scarlatti's men met me and spoke in a low voice: "Drivin' to Portsmouth, boss? Be careful. Scarlatti got word that Harger's goin' to send a truckload through tonight and he's layin' for it."

I nodded and a few minutes later was speeding toward Portsmouth. It was a cold night with a skitter of snow. The lights stabbed the darkness ahead of me and as the snowflakes whirled against the windshield, they seemed like frail white ghosts—the ghosts of past deeds. Suddenly a large long car whizzed past me, and the shout of roisterous merry-makers shattered the night. I caught but one glance, and then I stepped on the accelerator. For that one glance had shown me the face of Joan among the others. Straight down the Portsmouth road I followed them to within five miles of the town. Then they turned off and I was aware of their destination. Three or four miles down the road there was an infamous roadhouse run by a fellow named Jake. I could not realize that my baby girl was going to such a place, but there could be no other reason for their

taking this road. Well, I knew that she knew nothing of such things.

Scarcely had I turned into the road behind them, when one of my rear tires went flat. I got out in the cold and with numbed hands changed the tire. This took a great deal longer than it ordinarily would have because of the cold and driving snow. Then when I had finished, the engine had become chilled and I had a good deal of difficulty in starting the car again. Altogether, I was delayed at least an hour on the road.

At last I drove on and finally came to the roadhouse, outside of which I saw several cars parked, with lap robes thrown over the hoods to keep out the cold. Among these was the car in which I had seen my girl. I entered without more ado and several of the people inside who knew me looked up in surprise at seeing me in such a place. So closely had I guarded my hypocrisy that the man Jake, who owned the place, though he was one of Scarlatti's best customers, knew nothing of my complicity in the business.

Merriment was in full swing; drunkenness, dancing, gambling and disorder. And while I looked, uncertain as to what to do, a young man I knew came running down the stairs, with a white, frightened face. He spied me as soon as I did him, and my eyes widened. He hesitated, then came toward me. I knew the lad, a friend of my son's, not a bad chap, but reckless and thoughtless. He was sober enough now.

"Mr. James, for God's sake, come upstairs! Joan—"

"What about Joan?" I cried in sudden fear. "Is my daughter injured?"

"I don't know what it is," he half sobbed. "Come quick!"

I followed him upstairs on the run; he led me down a corridor and halted at a door out of which white-faced youths and girls were pouring. I recognized them as the party which Joan had accompanied. They fell silent as they saw me and within I

heard a pitiful voice sobbing and calling for me. With a cry I rushed into the room. My Joan—my baby girl—was lying on the bed with her arms groping in front of her. Her eyes were open and staring, but there was no light in them.

"My God, Joan!" I screamed and flung myself on my knees at her bedside.

"Daddy! Daddy!" she wailed, resting her head on my breast. "Where are you—I feel you—but I can't see you—my eyes—my eyes—"

"In God's name, what happened?" I turned frantically to the youth who had brought me here.

"It must have been the whiskey she drank," he said, wiping the sweat from his pale brow. "God, this has been a bad night's work! She didn't want to leave the party and come, but we persuaded her. We all drank a good deal on the way, and when we got here, she was—well, Mr. James, she was pretty drunk."

"Jake brought us in a bottle of Canadian whiskey which he said had just come in with a big load. Real stuff, he said, from north of the line. She drank more than she should have, and almost immediately began to scream that her eyes were going out."

"Send for a doctor," I begged.

"We can't. The wires are down between here and Portsmouth. But I saw Dr. Johnston, a young fellow just beginning to practice, downstairs."

"Get him," I ordered, and while the boy ran after the doctor I held my sobbing baby in my arms, and heart sick, I tried to comfort her. The doctor soon came, a hawk-featured man with a small mustache. He bent over Joan and made a cursory examination.

"Looks bad," he said briefly. "Mr. James, will you drive into Portsmouth and get my partner, Dr. Thornton? Tell him to bring his things—you'd better go because you can't trust any of these drunken fools here."

Though it tore my heart to leave my girl in that condition, I saw the

wisdom of his advice, and I hurried downstairs. On the way I met Jake.

"You black-hearted scoundrell!" I roared, gripping his shoulder and shaking him as a bulldog shakes a rat. "You swine! If my girl's blind, I'll kill you! You, selling deadly stuff to girls and boys!"

"It ain't my fault!" he howled, white-faced and wringing his hands. "I didn't know it was bad whiskey. The feller I bought it from always brought me good licensed stuff from Canada, always before. I'll empty out this last load. I don't want to blind my customers. I thought it was good!"

"Who sold you the stuff?" I asked savagely.

"Scarlatti!"

The room swam to my agonized gaze. I shook him until his teeth rattled.

"You lie! Scarlatti don't deal in that kind of stuff! He gets bonded whiskey from across the border."

He eyed me in amazement that I should know so much of Scarlatti's doings.

"Honest to God, Mr. James," he exclaimed, "I got this last bunch from him, like I been gettin' the stuff from him. All the rest was good—"

I dashed him aside and rushed out to my car, with all hell in my heart. I leaped in and sped for the Portsmouth road. I had gone only half a mile from the roadhouse, when a car loomed up out of the darkness and stopped. A hand signalled me to stop. I did so, and the driver got out. The scarred evil face of Scarlatti loomed up beside me.

"Say, James," he began, "we got a truckload from Marger while ago—"

I did not wait for him to finish. I was out beside him.

"You devil!" I screamed. "What was in that last load of whiskey you sold Jake Gulstein?"

Scarlatti frowned, then grinned. "Oh, that? Well, I'll tell you. You know I told you how I was goin' to cut down expense and danger? Well,

I got all kinds of bottles with British government labels. Well, instead of bringing the last load out of Canada, I made the stuff myself! I got a little island out on the lake where nobody comes and I got the finest still there you ever saw!"

"You fiend!" I shrieked. "You've flooded the country with stuff that blinds and kills!"

"Aw, be yerself!" he growled. "The suckers don't know the difference. What's the odds? It ain't goin' to hurt 'em. I just put a little stuff in to give the kick and save money. What do we care about the suckers? We don't drink ourselves, anyway."

For a moment I could not speak. With fists brandished above his head, I shrieked incoherent curses at him. He became angered.

"Aw, pipe down, you dirty old hypocrite!" he snarled. "What do you rate? Ain't you been pullin' down the long green? Ain't I been takin' all the chances? You old blood-sucker, you're lousier than I am, because I don't pretend to be anything but a racketeer and you—a pillar of the church! An upright businessman! A family man—"

With one terrible blow I struck him down and in my madness, I stamped him into the frozen mud until he lay still with blood oozing from his evil face. Then I leaped into my car and drove like a maniac. It was as if I sought to escape my own thoughts.

I turned into the Portsmouth road and was within a mile and a half from the outskirts when I saw a peculiar sight. A truck drawn up to the side of the road, dark and silent, and a huddled shape crouched over the steering wheel. With a sudden premonition, I drew up and stopped. I called to the driver, but only a low moan answered me. I went up to the truck and opened the door. The wounded man had slumped against the door, and as I opened it he tumbled out at my feet. The light from my parked car shone full on his white, blood-stained face.

"Oh God, my son!"

I shrieked those fearful words until it seemed my brain would burst. Then I dropped on my knees beside my boy and gathered him into my arms.

"Jack, Jack—in God's name, speak to me!"

He moved a little, half opened his eyes.

"Dad!" he muttered. "What are you doing here? Where am I? Oh, now I remember—oh, the pain in my breast. Harger warned me—Scarlatti's men—but they saw me first—I was taking a load of whiskey through—for Harger—"

My throat was dry and the black skies beat down on me like the iron hand of an avenging God.

"Why—why, son?" I managed to gasp out. "Why were you driving Harger's truck?"

"Needed—money—" he muttered, his voice growing fainter. "Been gambling too much—at college—didn't want you—to know—Dad—the last month I've been working—on the side—for Goldstein—who ran the racket—not far from the college. He knew—Harger—got me this job—for tonight. After I ran—this load I was—coming home—but Scarlatti's men—got me."

He slumped down in my arms and lay silent. A frantic examination showed that his faint breathing had ceased. How long I knelt over the stiffening body of my son, there in the cold and darkness, I know not. I have a vague remembrance of kneeling stiff and silent like a frozen image. Then of screaming and raving like a madman and beating my breast, tearing my hair and raving. Then of weeping in great tearing sobs that washed my cheeks with scalding tears. At last the thought of the pitiful blinded girl who lay back in Jake's roadhouse dragged me to my feet. I lifted Jack's body into the car and drove on, with my eyes like stone. The skies covered me like a shroud of lead. And so I came into Portsmouth.

This is a pitiful tale and I would bring it quickly to a close. Jack's mother looked on the dead body of her

son and gave one terrible scream that will haunt my ears until Doomsday; and no sound or word escaped her after that, from then until she went to join him less than a month later.

Not mine alone was the suffering. Woe and death and misery swept that part of the country on the wings of that vile venom with which Scarlatti had flooded the land. But it was the means of eliminating the curse at least. For I gave myself up and my confession and testimony brought the liquor rings to justice—not only of Scarlatti's but Harger's also. Both were given life terms in the penitentiary, and had they had their just deserts they would have gone to the chair. As for me, I know not how I escaped their fate. Partly because of my testimony I suppose. But I am sure that the jury could not find it in their hearts to deal too harshly with the broken, corpse-faced man who sat so listlessly before them, with his hair prematurely whitened. I escaped with only a large fine which cut more deeply into my already decimated fortunes.

My heart is too full to say more. Two years ago I had fortune, respect, honor, the love of a noble wife and of a fine son. Today I go my dreary way, earning a pittance to support myself and the pitiful sightless girl who was once the belle of

Dalville.

Oh, I have paid the price of my pride. In bitter gulfs of tears, in long sleepless nights of agony. In the dead faces of my wife and my son, in the unseeing eyes of my daughter, oh God, I have paid. Oh God, have mercy on me, a sinner.

And day upon dreary day, night upon brain-racking night, I will pay, and pay, until I at last find rest in that great dark sea where sorrow is not and trouble ceases to be. For in my heart of hearts I believe God has forgiven me and that I will join my loved ones before His throne of Grace someday.

Oh, my friends, take warning! Let not the lust of Mammon blind your eyes to the better and nobler things about you! Let not a light pass over your heads that you do not kneel and ask God for a humble and a contrite spirit. And His blessings rest upon you, if you will but heed the word of one who toils but to undo as much as he can of the evil he has done. I have found some measure of peace in the abiding love of my poor girl and it is only to make her happy that I live. Beyond this, life can hold nothing for me. But I look to a glorious resurrection, where all sins shall be forgiven, even though they be seventy times seven.

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He held out his empty left sleeve.

"This is the cost; I hold it light." He touched a shining medal on his breast.

"The cross of the Legion of Honor, the highest honor that can be bestowed on a soldier in France. But higher than this, even, I prize in my heart the knowledge that I have overcome my demon, that I am worthy of Moira."

I nodded, my heart filled with thanksgiving.

"She is in her room—waiting for you as she has waited for five years."

He went in; I heard Moira's sudden cry of joy and love. Then I sat down again in the moonlight and the scent of the honeysuckle and roses came to me with triple sweetness.

A MATTER OF AGE

by Robert E. Howard

I was always a large, fine-bodied girl who looked much older than I really was. That is why, I suppose, I began going with the boys younger than most girls. My mother let me go to the parties when I was thirteen, but she always made me go with boys my own age, and she always selected my escorts.

However, as girls do, I thought myself too grown-up for boys my own age and when I grew older and men began to notice me, I felt immensely flattered.

At last, when I was fifteen years old, I met a man, Harry Perkins, for whom I soon discovered an ardent infatuation. This man was married and was past forty, but his debonair and polished ways made me think myself wildly in love with him. I thought, little fool that I was!, that he returned my affection. He managed to see me at different places without arousing suspicion and once at a party, he drew me behind a curtain and kissed me. I returned his kisses passionately and from then on I was wax in his hands. Fearing he might hold my extreme youth against me, I lied about my age and told him I was nineteen, and because of my size and the worldly air I affected, he believed me.

Now we managed to keep my mother and his wife from becoming suspicious would be too long a tale, but at least our affair had reached the point where we had decided to run away together. Understand, I thought his intentions were perfectly righteous; nothing had passed between us but a good many kisses.

"I will settle this thing between my wife and myself tonight," he told

me, "and we will go to New York on the night train. My wife will agree to a divorce, I know, and we will stay at my sister's in New York until the decree is granted—then we will be married."

How could I have been such a fool? To imagine a man would deliberately give up wife and family to marry a foolish young girl—or how could I have believed that divorce and re-marrying were so simple as he said? But in my extreme youth, what did I know of such things? I trusted him utterly—and he must have laughed to himself at my credulity.

He told me to meet him at a certain hotel that night. I was to be there no later than nine o'clock. He would arrive soon after.

I made my mother believe I was going to spend a few days with a girl friend who lived on the other side of town, and packing a small suitcase, I went to the hotel and registered under a fictitious name.

In my room, I waited impatiently for my lover and whiled away the time building air castles of the future. Suddenly I heard the door open. I turned quickly, then stopped. Mrs. Perkins stood in the door! I had seen her only a few times, but I knew her and what I saw in her eyes froze my blood.

"You're the woman who's stealing my husband, aren't you?" she said in a dangerous tone, as she came into the room and closed the door.

"Harry is remarkably absent-minded," she continued. "If he hadn't written down your name, the hour he was to meet you, and the hotel and room number, and I hadn't found his notebook where he dropped it, I might

have fallen for that story he handed out about having to run up to New York on business for a few days. Humph!"

She drew an automatic pistol from her handbag and I nearly fainted. Mrs. Perkins was a large fine-looking woman, with a determined air about her and now I knew she meant business. She looked me over coolly, while my heart seemed to stop beating and my bobbed hair tried to stand straight up. Then her expression changed.

"How old are you?" she said abruptly.

"Fifteen," I stammered, too frightened to lie now.

"Large for your age," was all she said, but with a deep sigh of relief I saw her replace the pistol. I thought I was going to get off free after all, but I soon found I had another thought coming!

"I came up here to kill a vampire," said Mrs. Perkins, "but I'm going to punish you in a manner more suitable for your age. The idea! A child like you running around after men as old as Harry, when you ought to be at home studying. I'm going to treat you just as I'm sure your mother would if she knew what you were doing. Come here, young lady!"

She took my arm and led me over to a couch. I begged and pleaded, but Mrs. Perkins was merciless. She sat down on the couch, turned me across her lap, and tucked my dress up above my hips. Snack! Snack! Snack! went her open hand on the seat of my scanty bloomers and at every snack I yelled for mercy! Oh dear, what a spanking that was! I was crying long before Mrs. Perkins stopped and when

she did set me down she said, "Now then, young lady, you forget about Harry and run along home or I'll tell your mother."

I went without further argument you may be sure, and at the door the strangest thing happened. Mrs. Perkins stopped me and put her arm around me.

"Don't hate me too much for this spanking, child," she said. "You'll know better when you get grown."

And she kissed me.

We left the hotel together, Mrs. Perkins smiling cheerfully, I sulky and silent, and after she had gone on, I found I had left my handbag up in the room. I went back to get it and in the corridor I met Harry Perkins! I rushed to him and threw my arms around his neck, but he smiled and drew my arms down to my sides.

"My dear little girl," he said, "why did you deceive me? I got here just after my wife did, and listening outside the door, heard all that passed between you. I was not intending to marry you—I love my wife and our children. I would never have made love to you, had I known your real age. Why, child, I have a daughter nearly as old as you! I did not realize what a child you really are. This has taught me a lesson. I am not a scoundrel naturally—this is the first time I ever tried to deceive a woman and I promise you it shall be the last!"

So that's that and I have just a word of advice for young girls—don't imagine yourself in love with a married man, look out for a man much older than yourself, and don't lie about your age.

THE VOICE OF THE MOB

by Robert E. Howard

I was born in Galveston, Texas. I do not know whom my folks were because I was left on the back doorstep of a white family named Bender and they raised me. They had an old black woman cooking for them who had worked for them many years, and she brought me up just like I was her son, and the Benders treated me like I was, and gave her all the money needed for my clothing and the like. They gave me as much education as a colored child can get in Galveston, and when I was fifteen I went to work on the wharves, loading and unloading ships. I was a big fellow, strong as a bull, and I grew all the time.

I worked on the wharves till I was about twenty years old, as near as I can figure it, because of course I don't know exactly how old I was when the Benders found me, but I was very small—only a few weeks old.

Well, at the age of twenty I was a big man, six feet and one inch tall and weighing 180 pounds. I was lean and rangy and knew I would fill out and be bigger than ever. I was one of the strongest men on the wharves, and they have some terrible strong men there if anybody would just stop and watch those big black boys shifting cargo. I must have had some wild blood in me somewhere because I was reckless and always fighting with the other wharf boys or shooting craps or drinking gin. Still, I never harmed anyone or stole anything and was always polite to white folks.

There was a big young fellow working on the wharves with me then; his name was Arthur Johnson, and everybody called him Jack Johnson. He later became champion boxer of the world. He fought them in the fight

club they had in Galveston and was pretty good, though nobody ever thought he'd amount to much. He was the only man on the wharves who was stronger than I was and we used to spar. I did not like Jack Johnson much because he was very sarcastic in his speech, but he was a great boxer and he taught me a great deal about the game.

Well, one night when I was about twenty years old I got into a crap game in a place that had a pretty bad reputation and there was a bunch of us boys all gambling and drinking too much whisky. One of the other boys and me got into a row about something, I do not remember why. We got to fighting and I was whipping him when he pulled out a razor and cut me across the face. I carry the scar to this day and will carry it till I die. Then for the first time in my life I was mad and saw red and wanted to kill a man. I grabbed a beer bottle and broke it over his head, laying his scalp open, and then I gashed his face and chest with the jagged end of the bottle neck, until the boys pulled me off him to keep me from killing him.

Well, they arrested me and I got six months on the rock pile. After I got out of jail, I was ashamed to go back and face the Benders and tell them I had been in jail, and the scar on my face kind of changed my looks and made me look mean and wicked, where before I had been kind of good looking, folks said.

Well, I said, I will go North and so I went to Chicago. I got work in the packing yards, but so much blood made me sick and I could not stand to hear the cattle bellow when they

hit them with the slaughtering hammers, and it was cold up there, not like I was used to, so I went to Richmond, Virginia. About this time the notion came on me to go into the ring, because I was so big and strong, and Jack Johnson had taught me a lot. So I started fighting under the name of Kid Gromwell and won most of my fights, though I did not get much money. I never fought white men in the South, but always colored men.

I travelled around and was what they call a tramp fighter, meaning I never stayed two nights in the same place if I could. Of course I never trained much and was never a great boxer. Like many young men of my race, I had no ambition but to eat and sleep and have a good time. I liked to box and had rather fight than work, but I was not anxious to start seriously and take the denials that go with the game.

Well, I fought around this way until I was nearly thirty years old. You know when a man is thirty he is past his prime as a fighter. That is one business you must be young to be in. A man at twenty-five is at his best, but he begins to slip soon afterwards.

Well, I began to lose fights and not be able to get any, so I had no money and became more of a tramp than a fighter.

One day I came into a certain town in North Carolina, I will call it Karnsville, though that is not its real name. I was in ragged clothes, and hungry; I did not have a cent. There was a little fight club there and I got a fight with a black boy they called Snake, as a preliminary to a fight between two white boxers.

Snake was a very strong young fellow and punished me severely for eight rounds. But my strength was not less, my age had just made me slower and less accurate. I was a terrible hard hitter, especially with my right hand, and in the ninth round Snake

began to weaken and I hit him with my right and knocked him out.

But though I won the fight I saw I was done as a fighter. If I fought much more I would take so many punches on the head I would maybe lose my eyesight or go around idiotic like so many second-rate boxers do.

That night after I fought Snake I was in a colored restaurant eating and a black man came in that they called Blue Gum Bill, a big bad fellow. He said, "Ain't you the boy folks call Kid Gromwell?"

I said I was and he said let's me and you go talk some place where folks couldn't hear every word we said, so we went to a back room in a saloon and he said, "You're big and strong and you been around and know things. Let's me and you hold up the train that brings in the lumber camp's payroll."

But I said, no, that I had never stole anything or robbed anybody yet and I was not going to begin. We argued awhile and Blue Gum Bill got very mad. He said, "All right, you big coward, but don't you ever mention about what I told you because if you do I'll put you on the cooling board." And he showed me a big pistol he packed.

I said, "I never used no gun or razor yet and if you want anything I'll give it to you with my bare fists."

So we parted with a lot of hard feelings between us, and I went out of the saloon and a white man called me. It was Mister Jack Mulcahy, the deputy sheriff and as fine a man as ever lived. He was a young man and had not been married very long. He said, "Boy, I saw you fight last night. I've heard of you and I know you're straight. But wasn't that Blue Gum Bill you went into that saloon with? What did he want?"

Well, colored people never tell white folks what goes on amongst themselves, so I said it was just some foolishness that didn't amount

to anything. So Mister Jack says, "Well, Kid, you better keep away from him. He'll lead you into devilment."

"Well," I said, "Mister Mulcahy, I don't think he will lead me into anything, but when a man is hungry and broke, he is easy led anywhere there is food."

He laughed and said, "Well, that is so. How would you like to chauffeur for me?"

I said fine. And he said, "Well, come around to my house early in the morning and you can start to work. I will pay you good wages and you can wear a uniform. But don't let Blue Gum Bill hang around because he hates me. I arrested him once for burglary and he hasn't forgotten."

"Well," I said, "Mister Mulcahy, there isn't any love lost between this Blue Gum Bill fellow and me, and he won't hang around any place I'm at."

The next morning I was up before daylight, I was so anxious to go to work, I put my clothes on and came downstairs—I was staying in a hotel in the negro part of the town—and went out on the street. It was very early morning, kind of grey and misty and dim, nobody up, but I thought I would go to Mister Mulcahy's and wait till he got up. They lived away out at the edge of town with no real near neighbors, so it was a right smart of a walk. But I never got there that morning.

As I went past a house that stood kind of off to itself in a shabby part of the town, I heard a scream and a crash inside. It sounded like a woman screaming, so without thinking I jumped over the fence and ran up on the porch. I heard something going on inside so I kicked open the front door and ran in. I thought it was a negro house because colored people lived all around. Well, it was not. As I came in the front I saw a big black fellow run out the back, but could not tell who he was. I would have followed him, only I saw somebody was needed here.

There was an old white lady lying on the floor with her head all bloody and she looked like she was dead. Right near her was a trunk burst open and a lot of dollar bills of large size scattered around. I was scared, but I lifted her and put her on the bed and started to go get some water when somebody said, "Hands up!"

I put up my hands, and it was a policeman.

Well, it isn't any use dragging out this story. They arrested me and shut me up in jail. It seems like this old white lady had been living by herself a long time and never trusted banks, but put all her money in trunks. She rented houses to the black people in that neighborhood and had a good deal of money. So the people said that I came in and knocked her in the head and was about to get the money and go when the policeman caught me. The old lady wasn't dead, but unconscious, and at night she hadn't spoken a word or opened her eyes. Nobody believed what I told them, of course.

Well, I reckon Mister Jack did. He was in charge of me and was in the jail about sundown when the Judge came in and said, "Mulcahy, there's a lot of bad talk going on down town. A mob's gathering. I believe they're coming up after Gromwell sometime before midnight."

When I heard that I broke into a cold sweat all over. I was raised in the South and I know what a terrible thing a mob is. I was listening in my cell, you see.

"Well, Judge," said Mulcahy, "they'll take him out only over my dead body. I represent law and order in this town, and this is one time the mob's not going to take things in their own hands. If this boy's proved guilty in court, all right, the gallows for him. Until then, no man lays a hand on him."

Southern gentlemen always call a colored man a boy, if he's under fifty.

"Well, Mulcahy," said the Judge,

"you have four men here to help you. The people know you. If you'll stand firm, you'll keep them off. It's up to you. We've had too many lynchings in this country. We've got a bad name already. If this fellow's innocent like you think, so much the worse."

"Mulcahy," said the Judge, "I'm putting you on your honor. The honor and good name of this city, county and state rests on your shoulders tonight, sir!"

The Judge looked very grand and stern when he said that, and Mulcahy drew up and his eyes flashed. "On my honor, sir!" was all he said, but I knew and the Judge knew, that the mob would have to kill Mister Jack to get me.

Well, for all that I sat in my cell and sweated. The lights seemed to burn blue and ghastly, outside the moon was shining—the hanging moon—and the deputies were talking low and looking at me from the corners of their eyes. Every now and then I heard a low rumble or a shout from downtown and every time I shook in my shoes and my teeth rattled.

Mister Jack came in and talked to me, about ten o'clock. I could see he was worried.

"Kid," said he, "it looks very bad for you. I'm afraid the old lady is going to die without speaking. If she does, I don't see how you can escape the gallows. You couldn't tell who the fellow was that run out the back door?"

"No," I said, "No, Mister Jack, but there is a lot of bad blacks in this town."

"Yes, there is," he said, scowling. "And I'm worried, too—my wife just phoned me that her younger brother, who was to stay with her tonight, had to drive over to the next town to get their younger sister and he won't get to our house before midnight. I'm worried about her being there by herself with no near neighbors."

About that time I heard them coming. Oh, Lord, a mob's a terrible thing to listen to when they're not coming after you. But when you're the fellow they're going to hang and burn and mutilate if they get hold of you—I hope nobody that reads this will ever be in that fix. It would have been bad if I'd been guilty. But I was innocent.

It didn't sound like there was any people, any human people, at all in that crowd of a thousand that surged up the street. I could hear the feet pounding like an army was coming, and weapons clanging together, and all the time there was a deep hoarse roar going up like from a lot of wild animals that smelt blood. I couldn't distinguish any yells or words, just that terrible roar growing louder.

Mister Jack was pale, but he pulled his gun-belt around in front.

"The deputies have all skipped," said he. "The dirty cowards."

"Mister Jack," I said, "I don't think they're cowards, sir. I think they think like the mob does. Give me a gun with one cartridge in it, Mister Jack. You can't do nothing, all that gang. They'll kill you. Give me a gun and I'll shoot myself. Then they won't kill you or burn me."

"Not by a darnation!" said he, his jaws jutting so hard his teeth clicked together. "They've lynched their last man in this town!"

Well, the mob foamed up to the doors and a bunch of big hard-looking men with no masks shouldered their way in. Outside the gang fell quiet for a minute, holding their torches and axes and things, but it was like a cat is quiet just before she grabs a mouse and tears him open.

"We don't want to hurt you, Jack Mulcahy," they said. "We got nothing against you. But we want this nigger."

"You can't have him," said Mister Jack, standing up with his thumbs hooked in his gun-belt.

"Jack," they said, "there's no use

getting killed over a swine like that. We don't want to hurt you; we ain't a-going to hurt you if we can help it. But we going to string up that nigger."

They were edging closer when Mister Jack leaped back and flashed out two guns.

"Get back there!" he snarled. "I'll kill the first man that takes another step if he was my brother! Back up! And back out!"

They stopped, looking sullen.

"Jack," they said, "this is a matter of honor with us."

"It's a matter of honor with me, too," he growled. "Get out!" And he drove the leaders of the mob out of the door and locked it.

"They'll burn the jail," I said.

"They won't dare," said he. "Too many of them have kinfolks here in it."

Just then the telephone buzzed. Mister Jack answered it. Outside, the mob was talking in low fierce tones. I wondered if I'd be alive come morning.

Mister Jack turned back from the phone and he was white as a sheet. He was years older than he'd been a minute before.

"My God!" he gasped. "My wife—she's locked in her bedroom and a big black man is trying to burst down the door! Oh God, what will I do? If I go, I've broken my word to the Judge, disgraced the state, blackened my honor and his, and let an innocent man die—if I don't go—oh God!"

You can see what kind of a man Mister Jack was. Most men wouldn't have stopped a minute. They'd have left me to the mob. But he'd given his word and pledged his honor as a Southern gentleman and for the next few seconds he suffered like I've never seen anybody suffer.

"Mister Jack," I cried, "let me go! I'll sneak out the back before the mob surrounds the jail—if we both go, they'll find out and chase us. You stay here and argue with

them. I'll go and save your wife or kill the man that's scaring her! And I swear I'll come back and give up again!"

He looked at me with the cold sweat standing out on his face and hell in his eyes; then he opened my cell door.

"Take this gun," he said, "and in God's name, hurry."

"I'll hurry, Mister Jack," I said. "But never mind the gun; I never want nothing but my own two hands."

I ran down the corridor between the cells and slipped out the back way.

As I went I heard the mob banging on the front door and yelling and arguing with Mister Jack, and he argued back.

I saw nobody. All the people were around at the front of the jail. I ran as fast as I could go and I didn't stop running till I had left the main part of town and saw Mister Jack's house looming up in front of me, all dark, except for a light in one window. No other houses within hearing distance.

I ran up the back steps, and the back door was open. I saw the lock had been jimmied off. I am an athlete, of course, even if I am past my prime, but that run had me almost winded, but I didn't stop.

As I went upstairs at about eight stairs a hump, I heard the smash and a woman's scream. Mrs. Mulcahy had locked the bedroom door when she heard the burglar, and piled chairs and tables against it, so it took him a long time to break in. He'd had to go and get an axe and smash his way in.

Well, by the time I got to her bedroom door, I could hear a terrible struggle going on, and as I rushed in I saw Mrs. Mulcahy, a girl about eighteen, fighting with a big black man. Her clothes were nearly all torn off her, and when I came in the man dropped her and whirled around with a gun in his hand. It was Blue

Gum Bill.

He shot me as I came in, and it felt like a red-hot hammer hit me in the chest, but I didn't stop. I was just like a madman; just like a wild beast. I hit Blue Gum Bill under the heart with my right and his ribs cracked like rotten wood. He went down with me on top of him and as we fell I caught his throat in both hands and tore it just like a bulldog tears something with his jaws. Seems like I was stronger than ever for the minute.

Well, he gave a ghastly gurgle and I smashed him on the jaw. He lay still, and I went over to where Mrs. Mulcahy lay in a faint. I wrapped some bedclothes around her and put her on the bed; then I phoned the jail. Mister Jack's voice came, strange and strained.

"Everything's all right, Mister Jack," I said. "It was Blue Gum Bill. I think I've killed him, but your wife's all right."

"Thank God!" he said, with a kind of sob. "But Kid, what's the matter? Your voice sounds strange."

Then I noticed that the front of my shirt was soaked with blood and everything was getting grey and dim. My voice sounded like it was somebody talking a long way off.

"Blue Gum Bill plugged me," I said, getting weaker every breath. "But—I—reckon—"

Then everything started whirling and I pitched flat on my face. The last I remember, Mrs. Mulcahy had come to and was leaning over me, and then Blue Gum Bill worked up on his elbow and said in a horrible croaking

voice, "I'm dying—I want to say—I done that job this morning—I killed that old white woman—"

Mrs. Mulcahy gave a kind of scream, and then I don't remember anything else.

But I did come to later on for a few minutes. I was on a bed and I heard a lot of people talking. Seems like the Judge and the chief of police had come to the jail while Mister Jack was talking to me over the phone, and he hurried right on over to his house. Some of the mob followed him. Of course I didn't know that then. All I heard was the talking and was too weak and sick to much care.

"Listen here, you fools!" Mister Jack was saying. "This boy saved my wife from death and worse, and he may be dying now! My wife heard Blue Gum Bill confess to knocking the old lady in the head, just as he died. I told you the Kid was innocent. He may be dying now, himself; drilled right through the chest. Where is the doctor I called?"

"Right here," said someone coming through the crowd. "I've just been with the old lady who was attacked this morning. She's conscious. She's going to live; and she said the man who struck her was Blue Gum Bill."

Then I felt him working over me, and I passed out again from loss of blood.

Well, that's my story. It was a long hard pull, but I got over the bullet Blue Gum Bill gave me, and the Mulcahys saw I got the best of care. I'm working for Mister Jack now as a chauffeur—uniform and everything.

THE DEVIL IN HIS BRAIN

by Robert E. Howard

Frank Hansen was my boyhood chum. We went to grammar school and high school together; we shared each other's childish sorrows and joys, fought each other's battles and loved each other like brothers. Frank was a fine big athletic fellow, blond, with glorious yellow hair and blazing grey eyes—a true viking type. I idolized him. He was the hero of grammar school and of high school because of his athletic ability. A wonderful runner and swimmer, he was also the finest basketball player in the town and the star on the high school football team. I admired his wonderful strength and agility and admitted his superiority in all things except one—boxing. I mention this because it has a direct bearing on my story. Frank was taller and rangier than I, but I had a natural knack at the game, possibly a racial characteristic, for though born in America, I am a full-blooded Irishman.

But I always bested Frank, mainly because he could not control himself. He would always lose his temper and his head with it; when we boxed it usually wound up in a bloody slugging match with he trying to tear my head off and I fighting back purely in self-defense. I always got the best of him, but I did not enjoy these bouts because it hurt me to see my friend rushing at me in anger, even under the circumstances. He never held any grudge and always asked my pardon afterwards, and said he could not control his temper.

Well, we grew up into young manhood and Frank went away to college. I went to work in a local gymnasium as boxing instructor. Frank was an

successful in the new field as he was in high school. I heard of his triumphs and was proud of him. He wrote me continually and, though he never boasted, I could sense the boyish exuberance of him as he told of breaking the intercollegiate records in shot putting, hurdling and the hundred-yard dash, and of making his letter in football. But occasionally his letters hit a moody note and he burst into ravings about some member of the faculty or the team which worried me, for it showed me that far from curbing his ungovernable temper, he was allowing it to grow on him. Occasionally he came home and I was proud to be with him and to hear the praise the hometown folks showered on him. He did not allow this to turn his head—he had only one fault: a bad temper—yet you will see that one fault was enough to ruin his whole life.

He made the football team in his freshman year; in his sophomore year he was the star of the squad and the sports papers were full of his brilliant playing, mentioning him for All-American. Then suddenly there came a smash. On the eve of the biggest game of the year, he was expelled from college. In class, angered by some chance remark, he had given a professor a straight out cursing and he refused to apologize. His college lost the game and he was widely criticized. This embittered him and made him more reckless and passionate than ever. He entered an outlaw college, that is, a college whose football team was not a member of any conference or association, and was welcome there. But he could not get along with the coach, and in the dressing

rooms between halves of an important game, so far forgot himself as to knock the coach down when scored for some mistake or fumble.

That ended college for him and he returned to his hometown. I found him the same brilliant, reckless, lovable chap as of old, but at times the old bitterness cropped out in him, and he railed passionately at the people whom he maintained were responsible for his failure. I tried to make him see that he was as much to blame with a hasty head-strong disposition which would not brook criticism of any kind, but he would not admit it.

His parents were wealthy and while he looked about for some suitable employment he stayed in shape at the gym, went to dances and played about with the younger set of the town, with whom he was naturally a prime favorite. He got to playing cards and drinking a little too much, but for the most part, held himself well in hand.

I had little time for such things, for my hours were long at the gymnasium and I was deeply interested in the work. But my young sister Moira was just beginning to be interested in such things, and she often dragged me out to accompany her to social events. I often entrusted her to Frank and the two were together a great deal that summer.

Along toward the latter part of the summer, Frank and I were riding in the park one day, when Frank said suddenly: "By Jove, Steve, how surprised I was to see the change in Moira when I got back from college. Why, when I left, she was only a skinny little kid with freckles—when I came back, I found her to be a beautiful young woman. Strange how two years can make such a change. Steve, I might as well confess, I've fallen in love with your sister—"

At that moment his horse shied suddenly at something or other, nearly unseating him, and I was shocked at the change which swept over his

face. His eyes became dull and hazed like a madman's, and his features were contorted; sawing brutally at the hard bit, he lashed the horse's flanks madly with his quirt until I reached over and tore it out of his hand. The horse was rearing, snorting and trembling, unused to such treatment.

"Frank, my heavens," I exclaimed, horrified. "What's come over you? It's that infernal temper of yours—it was bad when we were boys together—it's been growing on you and it's a form of insanity now."

He nodded, the madness fading from his eyes; he seemed nervous and ashamed of himself and he stroked the quivering horse and soothed it in low tones.

"Yes, Steve, you're right. It's a devil in my brain, I guess, and it grows worse as I grow older."

"It will lead you to the gallows or to suicide," I answered. "This is the first time I ever saw you mistreat a helpless animal. You're getting worse; the next step will be mistreating women. You say you love Moira; I wouldn't dare trust her in your power."

He laughed at me. "You're making mountains of a mole hill, Steve; don't be so dramatic. Why, the idea is ridiculous—you know I wouldn't touch a hair on her pretty head for any reason in the world."

Well, I said nothing, but a cold feeling of fear and doubt stole over me as Frank's courtship of my sister progressed. It was soon evident that she was madly in love with him, and I could not find it in my heart to oppose the match, or put any obstacles in the way to happiness of my best friend and my beloved sister—at least, what they thought was the way to happiness.

Well, they were married, Frank got a rather important position with a local firm and for a few months all went well. They loved each other sincerely and no rift appeared in their skies of happiness. Then the

atmosphere changed. Neither of them said anything, but I noticed a difference. At times Frank seemed abstracted and worried, and several times I noticed tear stains on Moira's cheeks. I said nothing, not wishing to interfere and hoping things would adjust themselves. But it seemed to grow worse.

Moira had a will of her own and was not one to submit meekly to orders. Hers was the blood of the passionate and sometimes lawless black Irish and her wishes often clashed with Frank's. Frank was inclined to be a little domineering and opposition to him roused the devil in him.

One night I met Frank downtown and spoke plainly to him: "Frank, I don't want to seem intruding, but something tells me that you and Moira are not happy. Tell me about it, won't you—maybe I can help you."

He looked at me with an ugly expression. I can only explain his mood by the supposition that he had been in a furious state of mind for days and was not at himself. Anyway, for the first time in his life, he spoke to me as he might to a stranger.

"Steve, you keep out of this, understand? When I married your sister, you lost any say-so pertaining to her. What she and I do is our own affair."

I was taken aback and hurt. "Well, Frank," I said mildly, "I told you I wasn't butting in on your affairs, but you're my best friend and Moira—well, if she did marry you, she's still my little sister and I hate to see either of you unhappy—"

He interrupted me violently: "I tell you, keep your nose out of my family affairs, you ignorant Irish leather-pusher! If you try to butt in again, I'll knock your head off!"

He was shouting now, his face red and contorted, so I turned and walked away. I almost wept thinking of our former fellowship and of the change that had come over him.

That night after supper, an older

sister called me into a room away from the rest of the family and said: "Steve, Moira's leading a miserable life with Frank Hansen."

I nodded, unable to say anything.

"I was over there today," she went on, "and I finally got it out of her—Frank is fiendishly jealous and every time she even looks or speaks to any man, even an old friend, there is a terrible scene. She says Frank is like a madman and sometimes she's afraid of him. He actually acts as if he were going to strike her."

"He'd never strike her," I protested.

"Well, you can't tell," said my sister ominously. "Last night she had Joe Harper, our old friend you know, to dinner and Frank simply sat and glared the whole meal, saying nothing. Joe saw something was wrong and left as soon as he could, and then Frank raved at her something terrible—accused her of flirting with Joe and of bringing him into the house against his—Frank's—will."

For the first time a slow anger stirred in my breast. "Frank's a fool," I said angrily. "And he's going too far."

"Well," said my sister, "she was going to a reception tonight with the Fairleys and he forbade her—I guess there'll be a scene when she gets back."

A cold chill of foreboding gripped me. I could not sit still; and about twelve o'clock, the time Moira should be returning from the reception, I went over to Frank's house. I arrived there about twelve-thirty, or some fifteen minutes after the Fairleys had brought Moira home and had left.

As I came up on the porch I heard voices raised in fierce dispute, then the crash of a falling chair and a woman's scream. The door was locked, but I smashed it open and raced upstairs, my blood freezing as I heard the sound of vicious blows and agonized sobbing. I burst into Moira's bedroom to see a sight which was

burned into my brain for the rest of my life. Moira crouched on her knees, writhing at her husband's feet, and Frank, his face like a maniac's, gripped her slender wrists with one hand and rained cruel blows upon her shrinking body with a riding quirt. Her sheer evening gown was cut to pieces and soaked with blood.

At my horrified cry, Frank turned and released the girl, who crawled whimpering away from him like a wounded fawn. His eyes were dull with the old madness and his features writhed horribly.

"Get out of here!" he roared. "Do you dare interfere between a man and his wife?"

I paid no heed. When a man has shown himself to be unfit to care for his wife, then it is time for interference, even by a stranger. And that poor maltreated child was my little sister—for the first time in my life, a red fury blazed in my heart and I saw my former friend in a crimson mist. Entirely berserk, he rushed to meet me as I charged him, but this was different from all our glove bouts. This was primitive, bare-handed battle and I was out to batter him to death if I could do so. Each time the thought of Moira flashed across my mind a red tide of fury surged up in my brain.

Frank fought like a madman, but he was wild and unscientific; I was a skilled boxer and now I really fought to hurt and maim him. If he hit me at all, I do not know it, and in half a minute he was a battered wreck. Both eyes were closed, his nose was broken, a couple of teeth knocked out—still he fought on with the madness of desperation until a terrific right hand hook crashed against his jaw and dropped his senseless at the feet of the girl he had so brutally misused. And she dropped to her knees, sobbing, and cradled his bloody head in her arms and crooned to him as to a child.

I took her arm, but she looked up

at me, her soft eyes full of tears. "Steve, please do something for him! Will he die?"

"No such luck," I said harshly, for my heart was bitter within me. "What was he whipping you for?"

"Because I went to the reception tonight and he'd forbidden me—he must have gone crazy—please, Steve—"

I got some water and washed the blood off his face and he began to groan and show signs of coming to. I took Moira by the arm and drew her gently away from him.

"Come, child—you don't want to be here when he regains consciousness. Come on home, little sister."

She nodded sadly. "I can't live with a man who beats me—next time he might kill me as he's threatened to do. But I love him—oh, Frank—how can I leave you?"

I picked her up bodily and carried her out, and we left Frank alone in his darkened house.

The next night I was sitting on the porch of our house, alone, all of the family having gone to bed, when a figure stepped up on the porch. It was Frank. I rose and stepped toward him, hate flooding my heart.

"Have you come for another dose?"

From his bandaged face his eyes looked at me, clear and calm.

"Knock me down and stamp my brains out if you want to, Steve," he said. "I'm not trying to get Moira to come back to me—poor kid, she'd never be safe with me. I'm leaving town forever; she can divorce me on the grounds of desertion or anything she likes. I'm not good enough to kiss her shoes. There's no use trying it again because I know I can't control the devil in my brain. So I'm leaving—is the kid asleep?"

"Yes."

"Let me see her just once before I go, Steve," he begged. "We won't awaken her—I won't touch her. Just once, please, Steve?"

I nodded and led him into her bedroom, the one she had used when a

child and to which she had returned. She lay with her soft cheek cradled in one round arm, like a child, and the moonlight gently touched her sweet face and tousled black hair. Frank knelt beside the bed and looked hungrily at her, wincing as he noted the cruel welts on her slim shoulders.

"Poor little kid," he murmured. "Poor little Moira—God, I must have been mad!"

She stirred restlessly and moaned in her sleep; tears glistened on her long dark lashes as though from some unhappy dream. Frank bent his head and kissed one of the silky black tresses which lay over her pillow. Then he rose and stumbled out. At the door he turned to me and said hesitantly: "Steve, won't—won't you—for the sake of our old-time friendship—shake hands with me once more?"

Silently I shook his hand and with one word: "Tell Moira I'll love her—always!", he vanished in the night.

Well, the months passed and stretched into years. Moira never spoke Frank Hansen's name, but she grew thin and hollow-eyed. When I had told her the next morning of Frank's going, she had burst into a storm of weeping. Since then, she never wept. She refused to divorce him.

"He'll come back to me, some day," she said.

But the years slipped away and no one heard a word of Frank Hansen. He had vanished as if he had evaporated from the earth.

It was in the early summer, five years from the night Frank had left town. I was sitting on the old porch and the scent of honeysuckle and roses was sweet in my nostrils. A tall figure came up the walk and halted before me. A tall figure, straight, erect with a military bearing; one sleeve flapped empty. From a sun-bronzed, deeply lined face, a pair of deep clear eyes looked at me. The stranger took off his hat and my eyes fell on a mass of curly golden hair.

I leaped erect. "Frank Hansen!"

"Yes and no!" The voice was deep,

strong and resonant. "Frank Hansen, aye, but not the spoiled, blind fool you knew."

I thrust out my hand and his gripped mine.

"Moira?"

"She has waited for you."

Tears sprang to his eyes. "I felt she would, somehow. Steve, I have been through hell and back, and it has burned the dross from my nature and cleansed my soul. When I left here five years ago, I entered a school which makes men or breaks them. The Foreign Legion of France! There men are molded with iron discipline and schooled in self-control; there a man learns to curb his nature or he dies! It is a desperate school, and almost I died time and again, but always Moira's sweet face floated in front of me; always there burned the urge to make myself worthy of her.

"I remember soul-wracking days of drill and training; hideous marching over sandy wastes inhabited only by outlaws and vultures. I remember the terrible punishments which were the lot of such as I who had never learned restraint: the lash, the dungeon, the wheel, the cross. I remember the desperate men who were my comrades, men of every nation and every sin. I remember the fearful desert battles—the blood, the powder, the smoke, the dying. There in that terrible school the venom of my nature was sweated out in drops of blood. I who had never known what it was to curb myself or deny myself anything, learned rigid denial and iron control.

"Your iron fists first taught me a lesson; I was a spoiled child, a high school and college hero. Nothing had ever been denied me. I had never been punished in any way. The pain of that battering you gave me was submerged in the horror I felt regarding my treatment of poor little Moira. The mists cleared from my brain. I determined to conquer the devil in my brain or die. I have conquered it."

Continued on p. 16

I WORE THE BRASSIERE OF DOOM

by Sally Theobald

It was quite a change for a country-bred girl like me to pull up stakes and move to the big city, but I knew my life would never really get started unless I did. Most of my small-town friends were against it and Reverend McAllister just couldn't say enough about the perils and temptations I would face. He almost made me feel there was something sinful about even wanting to leave Smithvale. But my parents had confidence in me and told me so. I like to think I'm an independent-minded girl, but it did make me feel good to have their approval. So it was with a sense of assurance, even of adventurous expectancy, that I arrived in New York that day so many months ago. Or was it months ago . . .? In retrospect, I can no longer be sure. I'm sure you'll think me a dizzy little fool for not knowing a simple thing like that, but there's quite a good reason, I'm sure you'll agree. Just wait and see.

I pictured myself as quite the modern businesswoman and I had plans for my future that just wouldn't wait. I had saved up a good bit of money from several years of baby-sitting and quilting for neighbors, and now I planned to use it to set up my own hat shop. But first I knew I would have to look the part. No urban career woman would be caught wearing the old-fashioned simple print dresses I had always worn back in Smithvale! So bright and early the first day in town I marched into Macy's for a new look. I decided I'd best do a thorough job of it, from head to foot and, of course, from inside out. With a healthy dose of country girl embarrassment, I walked

into the lingerie section, surprised that these city women felt no hesitation about picking through all sorts of unmentionables (some of them not very ladylike!) right out in public. But I knew that was just one more part of my rural upbringing that would have to go! After all, I was one of those "city women" now!

As I wavered between two possible choices, wondering whether to pick the more conservative brassiere or the more daring, suddenly a saleswoman appeared as if from nowhere. At first I didn't even realize she was part of the floor help, for she certainly wasn't dressed in the snappy fashion one would expect at a store like Macy's. In fact, pardon me for saying so, but the woman looked almost like an old crone from a child's storybook.

"Don't be startled dearie! I saw you were having a difficult time deciding and thought perhaps you could use some help from someone with . . . experienced judgment."

"Oh, you're awfully kind," I told her, feeling a bit guilty for my reaction a moment earlier. "Wh-what would you suggest?"

"Look here in the mirror, child. You see, you're very well endowed, and I'd think you would want the brassiere that flatters your figure the most, no? I'm sure this one would help you attract the young gentlemen, if you'll forgive my speaking so plainly."

"Oh, well I hadn't really thought about that, to tell you the truth." But I'm sure Reverend McAllister had. I was beginning to see what he meant. But I was also feeling my oats and decided to be a little daring. This

brassiere did lift and support me better, with a deeper neckline to boot. In the fitting room mirror I could see just what a difference these city-designed clothes could make on my appearance—and on my social life! Almost as a prayer, I whispered, "I promise I'll be careful, Reverend McAllister!" As I placed the bra back in its box I noticed something else: the odd seam design. Across each cup, radiating out from the center, was a five-pointed star with an oval or eye-shape in the center. I thought little of this, except to guess that the design might have something to do with the nice way the bra seemed to uphold and almost caress me. Yes, I was definitely going to buy this brassiere. And with luck, before long the bra would not be the only thing caressing me!

When I came out of the dressing room, there was no sign of the old hag who had waited on me. I wanted to thank her for her help, but I must admit I was glad she was gone. She had struck me as almost spooky.

Well, things proceeded just dandily! In no time I found a store front in a good, busy section, and it had a small apartment located just upstairs. How lucky could a girl be? It took a few days for people to notice the store after I had it suitably decorated and open for business, but when the busy shoppers paused long enough in their brisk hikes through the crowded avenues, they lost no time in giving me an encouraging first week of operation. And you know something? I found that whenever I wore that new brassiere, men seemed to come into the store like magic. At first they would pretend to be looking for a gift for a mother or sister, and a few actually did purchase something I suggested, but most seemed to be window shopping for me! Imagine my embarrassment when I could catch their eyes straying from my face down to my chest!

But I think I must have blushed more than they did.

Such attention can turn a country girl . . . I mean a new city girl's head, believe you me! Soon I was receiving invitations so frequently that it became difficult to wedge in another date! Life was really starting for me! Oh, why had I waited so long to move to the big city?

Oh, I admit, some of my gentlemen callers were not exactly dreamboats, but in a city populated by herds of rat-faced mongrels and ruffians, one had to make do. And if a girl waits until Mr. Perfect comes along, she's liable to wind up an old maid. And what some of them lack in appearance or refined manners, they more than made up for in cultural sensitivity. For instance, one of my first dates was a sort of Polynesian half-caste who surprised me by taking me to the Museum of Natural History to see an exhibit on loan from Boston's famous Cabot Museum. The exhibit itself was a bit grotesque, but I guess it wouldn't seem that way to a real student of antiquities, and that's what Manuel was. He'd become interested in these things on his various voyages with the Merchant Marine.

And then there was the time another young man took me to see a most interesting electrical show that was kind of like a movie and kind of like a stage show, hosted by an odd-looking fellow with swarthy skin. Many people in the audience came out of the auditorium almost in a daze, but I was fine, and my young man told me not to worry my pretty little head about it.

My social life was in full swing, and I didn't dare write home about all of it. What would my old small-town friends with their old-fashioned notions think? Dating all those men? No need to ask what Reverend McAllister would say! And, who knows? Even my parents might start worrying. What had happened to their little Sally?

Reverend McAllister was right:

there were temptations. I would even invite my male guests to stop by my apartment when we got home at a respectable hour. I was just the slightest bit hesitant at first, but when I saw what gentlemen my dates were, I dropped my reserve. Once and a while one of them would get a little carried away, but you wouldn't want a man who wouldn't. Would you? Strange, but I noticed how they would get more passionate on the evenings I would wear that special brassiere. But then again it wasn't so strange, was it? I've already said how much it did for my figure.

Here's what would happen, in case you can't guess for yourself! We would sit there on the couch smooching and my date would say something romantic like, "My dear, you have no idea how much I appreciate you." Then his hand would begin to drift from my shoulders southward to hover above my breast. My brain and my heart would struggle as I watched helplessly. And just as I had decided to give in to passion and stop wriggling away from him, my date would close his eyes and mumble softly as he passed his hand in strange motions and gestures back and forth without actually touching me! (And we were always told the male of the species has less self-control!) As for the mumbling, I simply supposed it was the "sweet nothings" you hear so much about, though they weren't being whispered in my ear.

Oh, to think what I would almost let them do! Even though none of them ever did it, I realized I wanted them to! What was happening to me? Was the pace of the city getting to me, eroding my cherished virtue? Oh, I couldn't admit it to myself then, but the truth is plain enough when I look back: I was a whore!

And it wasn't only petting. No, there was the drinking as well. Back home I had been the three-time winner of the Women's Christian Temperance Union's annual quilting bee. But here I was having a glass of wine with din-

ner! And dear God, dare I admit it? Sometimes two! This may not sound like much to you, dear reader, but there were warning signs telling me loud and clear. "Silly girl, slow up!" The dreams were the worst. Yes, the dreams alone should have sent me packing and back to Smithvale. But they didn't. I was just too headstrong. I had tasted the fast life and I couldn't get enough of it! My coming to New York had been a mistake, all right. When I first set eyes on it, I saw its collection of spiralling towers and its skyscraper canyons as a wonderland of opportunity and limitless new horizons. Yet now that Babylonish burg had become a brothel, and I nothing more than one of its cheap sluts. Was there one of my young men whom I hadn't kissed on the first date, and on the lips at that? Every day as I walked down the street to the automat for lunch I could feel the windows of the towering office buildings above me looking down on me with mocking scorn. I saw in the face of each sidewalk derelict and streetcorner strumpet a reflection of my own, a prophecy of what I would inevitably become, what I already was inside!

And every night I tossed and turned in anguish, scarcely able to snatch a single hour's rest for the torments inflicted at first by my conscience, then by those awful nightmares, which I immediately knew to be a form of delirium tremens from those glasses of rosé. The dreams! How can I convey them to you? I should try, I suppose, because you might as well know the whole story. They began innocently enough. I found myself once again in the lingerie department of Macy's on my first day in town. I relived the encounter with the strange old crone, the purchase of the brassiere. Yet even this recurring scene seemed to trouble me greatly though why I could not tell. It was as if there were from the start some menace hidden in that meeting that I only now began to sense, however

dinly.

Finally I could take no more of this endless replay and I resolved to take some action. Without knowing what I hoped to gain by it, I returned to the lingerie department to seek out the old saleswoman. Somehow it did not at all surprise me that she was nowhere to be found. I had arrived at about the same time of the day I had originally seen her, but perhaps she was out sick or had been changed to a different shift. Anyway, I found the manager and asked. Of course, I did not know who to ask for by name—does one ever exchange names with sales personnel? None of my customers ever had, unless they wanted a date!—so I tried to describe her. That was easy enough to do and, besides, how many women like this would Macy's employ? I had been surprised to find even the one.

"Miss," the manager said chuckling, "I can't say as we've employed anyone of that description as long as I've worked here! Are you quite sure you have the right store? They'd be more likely to hire help like that at Gimbel's." Inevitably the man had begun to let his eyes sink to my breast. I turned and left, rather rudely, I'm afraid. Needless to say, I was shaken! Could it perhaps have been Gimbel's? But no. I had at least that much faith left in my own senses. I'm not sure how long that continued to be true, though.

The dreams became much worse. The old hag still visited me in the dreams, but they were no longer simple repetitions of that first meeting. She seemed to appear right there in the bedroom with me, looking at me as if beseeching me to do something. At first I couldn't tell precisely what she wanted, though I knew it must be something unwholesome, and I didn't really want to find out. But each night the dream grew clearer and lasted longer, so that at length I could see where in the darkened room her clawlike hand pointed. Why, she was simply indicating my very own

dresser, and on it a Macy's box containing . . . the brassiere! The room was dark, but I could see the bra plainly, for the seams glowed eerily along the star-shaped pattern traced upon the cups.

Yes, there seemed no other conclusion possible but that the old witch wanted very much for me to put on the brassiere. There seemed no harm in it, and perhaps having gained what she sought of me, however apparently pointless, the old hag might cease plaguing me. At least those were my half-formed thoughts as I rose groggily from my bed, clutching at my nightie against the cold and to protect what little modesty I had left. The nightie, by the way, was not glowing; I actually had bought that at Gimbel's.

Still sure that I was but dreaming, I turned my back to the old woman and let the negligee fall in a rumpled pile to the floor. I reached for the brassiere and began to fasten it. Despite the darkness and my half-asleep wits, I was able to reach around behind me and secure the bra in place with surprising ease, something I still had trouble doing fully awake in broad daylight. It was almost as if some invisible force or entity guided my fumbling fingers.

Despite the strange unaccountable glow, the brassiere felt no different than it usually did. As I absently pondered this fact, I turned to see if I had the old witch's approval—only to find that, as in the store weeks before, she had vanished! Only now something else had taken her place. I began to scream, but the numbing shock of the sight choked off the sound in my throat. Where the crane had stood only moments before there now stood a towering, barrel-shaped thing with what seemed to be starfishes sprouting from either end of its vertically ridged trunk. I think it was slightly bent over so as not to scrape the ceiling, so great was the height of it. Like a gigantic, malevolent Christmas tree it

stood, this unwelcome intruder from beyond the cosmic void of unguessable dimensions. Before I slipped into merciful oblivion, I recall thinking bitterly that I could never again celebrate the holiday season with jolly cheer untainted by this loathsome vision of the true horrors of the cosmos undreamt of by men.

In the morning I awoke, relieved, for at least the dream was ended. But terror returned a thousandfold when I looked down and saw that I was wearing the brassiere! Then it had been no dream! But perhaps I had merely sleep-walked. I clung to that faint hope as if clinging to sanity itself. Ironically, for the first time in many days I felt refreshed by the deep sleep I had finally had—thanks to fainting! But the new vigor I felt at first only made me more inclined to panic. But I knew I must control myself. Like it or not, there was nothing to do but go to work as usual. Perhaps as I slipped into the normal routine, my mind would calm down enough that some idea might occur to me. One did. Why not call Reverend McAllister, unburden my soul and ask for advice? Surely he would know what to do. It was only my foolish pride that had stopped me from thinking of it before. So at lunchtime I called him long distance. Luckily he was in and agreed to take a bus into New York to talk in person in just a few days. As I replaced the receiver, I felt the greatest sense of calm I had felt for weeks. I was able to make it through the rest of the workday calmly, though unable to resist an occasional shudder at the prospect of trying to sleep that night. I hoped and prayed the days, and especially the nights, until the Reverend's visit would pass quickly. As it turned out, I never knew when or if Reverend McAllister arrived.

That night I took sleeping pills and went to bed. I had no trouble getting to sleep. But then the pills betrayed me, for I must have been put

so soundly to sleep that even my own screaming could not wake me. I slept facing the window, but at some point during the night I turned over, settling my face into the softness of the pillow, facing into the room. I was awakened or dreamed that I was awakened by a strange unearthly piping that seemed to come from my dresser. Reluctantly I opened my eyes, or dreamed I did, and I saw what I knew I would see. There were both the old hag and the towering thing scarcely able to contain themselves for the unholy joy they felt at the prospect of what I was sure would be my doom. The crinoid thing (or was it an echinoderm? High school biology had scarcely prepared me for this!) shook and swayed, giving off irregular pulses of nearly visible purplish radiance. The crone laughed, though I could hear no sound, and stepped toward me. This time she did not simply beckon but held something in her hands, gesturing for me to take it. It was a moment before my eyes adjusted sufficiently to the gloom to allow me to see what she held. But of course it was the brassiere, glowing as before, but now seemingly alive with some sort of blasphemous sentience. Its straps waved gently, moved by no breeze, eagerly seeking to embrace me.

With no will of my own to call upon, I rose again from the bed, again tossed aside my nightie and stepped up to the hag. Guiding my breasts into the familiar cups was all I needed to do, as the bra proceeded to pull snug and latch itself. What further outrages to sanity and modesty awaited me I dared not guess. But I was soon to find out.

All about me, the furniture, the two hideous presences, even the walls of the room itself, fell away and I was left falling, falling into the void. At first I hoped that I was simply blacking out with shock, but I was not to be so favored. A new scene began to take form to replace the old, and though I could not feel

firm ground beneath my feet, I did seem to be no longer falling. Around me on all sides there began to emerge from the darkness what seemed to be two mighty jaws starting to close upon me. Floating free in the aether as I was, I began to retreat, futilely, in the only way left to me, by curling into a fetal ball. As I lowered my head into my breast, I noticed that I was now completely naked. Instantly I realized with certainty what it was that sought to swallow me up. No reader can have failed to guess that it was the two cups of the brassiere of doom, grown to fantastic proportions and coming together to form a sphere about me. No sooner had I realized this than I did at last sink into welcome unconsciousness.

I awoke. But I did not yet dare open my eyes. Desperately I hoped that I was back in my apartment bedroom, but I knew I was not. In the distance I could hear strange thundering winds, whipping in their fury as though from out of the cosmic gulfs of endless night. Borne along on these currents were the soul-shaking cries of winged and faceless devils never glimpsed on earth by sane or waking men. At length I could keep my eyes closed no longer. The first thing I saw upon opening them was more darkness. But immediately a peculiar radiance began to grow in the distance. At first it was but a dim lambence as of a false dawn, but then

a form began to emerge from the brightness. I could not tell whether the light were itself assuming some more definite form, or whether it had simply served as a portal for the appearance of the strange being.

The entity itself was at first hard to grasp with the eye. It looked like a vague congeries of luminous globes. As I looked more closely at the thing as it approached me (or as I approached it--in that dimensionless warp there was no way to tell), I knew what was to be my fate. You see, the strange brassiere had been a doorway . . .

You will understand my thoughts and memories are confused now. I am not even sure how, or whether, I am able to communicate all this. But I must try to share my story with you, since I have nothing else that I may do unto all eternity but rehearse my tale again and again. For you see, I now know myself to be but a single facet of that interdimensional entity; as my vision of it became clearer I could see to my horror that the pulsating globes all had nipples. The rest of me is fast dissolving into the gelatinous mass, but before the Sally-facet is no more, and only my breasts remain, let me leave you young girls with my sad story as a warning. Stay home in Smithvale. Learn from my experience. It's too late for me, but you stay out of the brassiere of doom!

TRUE GHOSTLY CONFESSIONS

by Will Murray

For almost seventy years the confession story magazine has been, for better or for worse, a constant presence on America's news stands. It all started back in 1919 when publisher Bernarr MacFadden, a bushy-haired physical culture, diet and sex guru, realized that confession was not only good for the soul, but instructive to others, and put out the first issue of *True Story Magazine*. Although *True Story* purported to print real-life examples of how fallible people—mostly women—learned from their own tragic mistakes and eventually found happiness, in fact the stories were written by a faceless host of professional writers. *True Story* sold like crazy—over two million copies a month at one point.

True Story was an oversized bed-sheet magazine, not a pulp. It was printed on slick paper to facilitate reproducing its now-quaint rotogravure photographs. These photos were used in lieu of line drawings and, although obviously posed by professional models, they lent a sense of urgent verisimilitude to the scenes they were supposed to illustrate. Bored housewives—MacFadden's target audience—never seemed to wonder how it just happened that a photographer was handy to record all this personal distress. But no matter. The photo gimmick was less a stroke of genius on MacFadden's part than a matter of convenience. His greatest success had been a magazine called *Physical Culture*, and because it used posed photographs, *True Story* did, too. It was as simple as that.

The *True Story* formula was simple: the narrator of the story must "Sin, suffer, and repent," and ultimately find redemption. That formula, un-

changed, is still used today. The only difference is that in the early days, the sins were not particularly grave. Jilting a lover, french kissing in public, and like offenses were about as steamy as *True Story* got. By the Thirties or so, they had mustered up the courage to describe the small terrors of unwed motherhood. Today the true confession titles are not afraid to root around in the forbidden gardens of homosexuality and drug abuse. But one thing has changed: the stories no longer carry bylines. They are absolutely anonymous. In the old days, the Confession mags boasted not one, but two bylines—the name of the narrator (all confession stories are told first person) and the nominal author. The usual convention was to profess that the narrator related his other story to the writer. "By Betty Boop as told to Mickey Spillane" was the usual style.

MacFadden's original magazines became so popular that by the mid-twenties, the racks were crowded with knockoffs, rip-offs and other forms of imitation like *True Confessions*, *I Confess*, *Hollywood Confessions*, *Real Life Confessions*, *Marriage Stories*, *True Marriage Stories*—you get the idea. MacFadden himself attempted to expand his market with variations on the theme. In 1923 he added *True Romances*. It was followed by what I imagine was the first "true crime" magazine, *True Detective Stories*, in 1924, then by *Dream World*, *True Experiences* and, in 1926, *Ghost Stories*.

Ghost Stories? That's right. For years magazines and newspapers had been publishing anonymous, but supposedly factual, supernatural sto-

ries. In casting about for a new variation on the confession theme, MacFadden must have pounced upon this old chestnut as one easily adaptable to his format.

Why Bernarr MacFadden didn't deem to title this strangest of confession titles *True Ghost Stories* is beyond me. But *Ghost Stories* is without doubt a confession title. It followed the same format as MacFadden's other titles. It was a bedsheet magazine filled with first-person encounters with the supernatural, recounted by the very person who had the horrific experience, but usually "told by" or "narrated by" an experienced writer. It even boasted scads of photographs. These brown-tinted wonders seemed populated with out-of-work silent screen actors, and most of the early covers were painted from movie stills, with a ghost or phantom thrown in. Unlike MacFadden's other titles, *Ghost Story's* photographs employed a lot of special effects. Double exposure ghosts, phantoms and shades, often augmented by misty special effects, were the rule. Disembodied hands were another popular effect. If you picked up a random issue of *Ghost Stories*, you could almost always count on a halftone of a disembodied hand for your 25 cents.

Ghost Stories did hedge its format a bit. Sometimes it reprinted real ghost stories by famous authors like Algernon Blackwood, making no attempt to convince its readers that these were "real" supernatural experiences. They did H. G. Wells' oft-reprinted "The Red Room" in the April 1927 issue—which was probably a mistake. It became one of the most plagiarized stories pulp editors ever contended with. And *Ghost Stories*, by the very nature of the fiction it published, was a frequent target of plagiarists. It got so bad that they had to run a notice in every issue warning that the practice constituted using the mails to defraud.

But for the most part, *Ghost Stories* stuck to its formula. Only it

wasn't Sin, Suffer and Repent. It was more like Die, Dematerialize and Repent. It also carried a lot of stories like "I Married a Ghost" and "Our Astral Honeymoon," as if further proof of its confession orientation were needed. The marrying-a-ghost plot was so overused in this magazine that one need only skim the contents pages of various issues to see other examples leap out. Like "How Can I Marry a Ghost?", "Married after Death," "My Invisible Courtship," "He Fell in Love with a Ghost," "Husband or Ghost?", "How I Fitted My Love against a Ghost", "She Married Her Astral Lover," and the unforgettable "My Bewitched Bedroom." ("Can a piece of furniture commit murder?" asked the editorial blurb. "This story answers the question in startling fashion.")

But even the less tepid ghost stories were not exactly of *Weird Tales* quality. For although *Ghost Stories* premiered about a year after *Weird Tales* was launched, the former was not perceived as a rival to the latter, or even as intended for the same audience. As a result, few *Weird Tales* authors appeared in its pages, and those who did appeared but once or twice.

Frank Belknap Long was one of the one-shot *Ghost Stories* contributors. His "The Man Who Died Twice," in the February 1927 issue, is perhaps typical of the magazine. It's the story of a spineless man named Hazlitt who storms into his employer's office to protest being replaced by another man. He can't understand why everyone ignores him as if he wasn't there—even his wife, whom he finds in the arms of another man.

Then he suddenly remembers. He's dead! His wife poisoned him months ago and he's been wandering dazed and dead, all this time. Now a ghost, he's unable to exact his revenge. While wandering the streets unhappily, he sees a little girl about to be run over by a car. He leaps, pushing her out of the way, and is killed all

over again, this time for good. Hazlitt's wife never does get her just desserts, but in *Ghost Stories* the spook is all that matters. The tales are often merely vehicles in which to showcase still another ghostly manifestation.

Long's story—certainly not one of his best—is nevertheless true to *Ghost Stories'* formula. It didn't matter who the ghost was or what he did, just as long as he did it spookily. *Ghost Stories* ghosts could be evil, like the ghost of the jilted maid who lurked by the river to drown the unwary (in "What Was the Cry at the Falls?"), or they could be good, like the phantom who became Santa Claus just to please a poor little boy (in "Johnny Kelly's Christmas Ghost"). Friendly ghosts were very popular in these pages. A crippled little boy got a whole circus full of ghosts to entertain him in Harold Standish Corbin's "The Ghost Circus," thanks to the ghost of Henry Jenkins. Jenkins was a disembodied spirit who frequently appeared in the pages of *Ghost Stories*, helping out us "mortals" with our earthly problems. Each story explained how Henry got to be a ghost. It seems that Henry had spent his earthly days sitting in a chair in front of a Connecticut stable, growing lazier and fatter each hour. One day, his corporal weight reached the magic 320 number and the chair broke under his weight. "The resultant fracture of his neck precipitated him into the Great Beyond," wrote the author. An interesting touch was that the photos of Henry Jenkins that appeared in various issues all seemed to have been posed for by the same portly gent. When he was in spirit form, Henry looked a little like Caspar the Friendly Ghost.

There were also a handful of Jules de Grandin-style occult detectives inhabiting these pages. Robert W. Sneddon wrote several stories featuring Mark Shadow, *Ghost Detective*. One was actually published under Shadow's byline. There were also

Walter Adolphe Roberts' Hugh Doere Purcell, Carol Lansing's medium, Karamahati, and Victor Rousseau's Dr. Martinus, Occultist.

One thing could be said about the specters inhabiting *Ghost Stories*; they were a diverse bunch of spooks. There were ghost airmen, invisible quarterbacks, spectral Vikings, disembodied dolls, phantom cars, evil trees, phantom hounds and ghost tigers. The writers had to work hard to find some new wrinkle. Once, *Ghost Stories* actually published a tale about a haunted pillow! They were also inconsistent. The shade of Frank Belknap Long's Hazlitt was a perfect example. People walked right through him. He couldn't be seen or felt. Yet he was able to push a little girl out of the path of a speeding car, and somehow have his ectoplasm annihilated by that same machine. At one point, Hazlitt gets so angry, Long wrote, that "The blood was pounding in his ears." In a ghost?

Horror was not *Ghost Stories'* primary concern. Spiritualism was. Survival after death, life after death, spirit writing, mediumism, the Other World, this was the meat of *Ghost Stories*. And by modern standards, it's thin stuff wrapped up in yards and yards of sticky sentimentality.

Critics of *Ghost Stories* have derided it because of its one-note emphasis on ghostly hijinks. But a close examination of the magazine shows that isn't entirely true. Mostly true, yes, but not entirely. Stray supernatural stories of other kinds floated through *Ghost Stories'* pages.

There were zombie stories, like Victor Rousseau's "The House of the Living Dead." A five-part serial, it is of interest because at one point the hero has his body possessed by a demon called Dagon. This Dagon is part of a legion of fiends controlled by that arch-Satanist, Chevalier Morandi, and not a Lovecraftian Old One. Victor Rousseau was really

Victor Rousseau Emanuel, an old-time Science Fiction pulpster. This serial was part of his Dr. Martinus series.

And there were vampire stories, like Urann Thayer's "A Soul with Two Bodies," a serial that began in the February 1928 issue. "No more amazing story was ever penned," the editor claimed. "The author vows it was written by a dead man in a tomb." In brief, it's the account of an American soldier who in World War I became involved with an Austrian Count who was also a vampire. He found his own mind transferred to the Count's dead body, but succeeded in killing them both after writing his story. Oh, sure.

There was even a story about a voluptuous succubus named Vulpia, but she was only a subordinate character in Walter Adolphe Roberts' "The Mind Reader."

But even these wild imaginings could be classified as ghost stories of a sort, or stories of the Undead, as Bram Stoker liked to term them. However, there were some yarns that clearly fall outside that broad definition.

One interesting specimen was "On the Isle of Blue Men," by Robert W. Sneddon—"From the Curious Manuscript of 'The Solitary'" explained the title page. It appeared in the April 1927 issue and purported to be a true story. The manuscript, written by a hermit known only as the Solitary, told of his experience on a rustic island off Scotland with his wife, Alice, back before he became a hermit.

It seems the Solitary was really artist John Scott, a successful young man when his yacht got stuck on this island. He and the missus are taken in by the rustic inhabitants during a storm, but the taciturn natives at first balk at giving shelter to Scott's wife because she is a woman, and worse, a redhead. It seems one of the rustics, Angus Jamieson, is possessed of second sight and is, in his words, "seeing beyond."

"The call is coming," he warns. "Aye! The dark one is at hand, the dread one that we will be calling The Kindly—"

Angus is especially concerned because Alice is a redhead, and there is an old saying on the island: "The red-haired witch and the blue men come together."

The blue men, as it turns out, are unseen denizens of the deep who besiege the tiny cabin during the storm. Scott first sees one as a "blue-black, shadowy, twisting thing" diving into the water. At first glance, it looks like a huge manlike frog, but he decides later it must have been a seal. But later in the night a white "blob of flesh" with "dead, unwinking, fishy eyes" appears at the window. A search party follows it out into the night, and one of the party is later found—or, rather, his arm is. It has been ripped from its socket.

Scott then discovers the creatures, and the scene is one that might have been torn from "The Shadow over Innsmouth":

"About the base of the lighthouse crawled groups of the creatures so closely massed that their shapes were indeterminate. They moved with a strange undulation, and for the moment I had the impression I looked down on waves. There was a flickering movement on their surface, and after a little I was able to see that their upper limbs terminated in a bunch of whipping tentacles."

Scott takes Alice away in a boat, but it is overrun by tentacled blue men, who snatch Alice under the waves. Scott is cast ashore on another island, where he spends the rest of his days as the Solitary, writing his manuscript which was discovered—presumably by Robert W. Sneddon—after Scott's death.

Although Ghost Stories ran its share of non-ghostly stuff, like Edmund Snell's "The Black Spider," about a Japanese scientist who creates giant insects; "Dancers in the Sea," by Bill Hacker, Deep Sea Diver

as told to W. A. Cornish, which was really a mundane story about drowned corpses trapped under the sea, and not even remotely supernatural, "On the Isle of Blue Men" was the only genuinely *Weird Tales*-style story I've found in *Ghost Stories*. But I'm sure there are others. Maybe as many as three.

A vaguely similar story was "The Vanishing Lighthouse," by Nathalie Rogers as told to Kerr Stocker, in the February 1928 *Ghost Stories*. Nathalie Rogers is rowing along Long Island Sound, dreaming of her boyfriend, when she spies a pinkish-green gelatinous thing with froglike orbs staring up at her from the water. Thinking it a jellyfish, she gives it a swat with her oar—and two transparent jellied arms grab hold. But she breaks free. To make a short story shorter, it turns out that the thing is just the ghost of a drowned lighthouse keeper who had committed suicide over Nathalie's great-grandmother. The ghost wants to pick up the romance where it left off, but with Nathalie this time. Virtue and a helpful bootlegger win out in the end, however. The ghost's unghost-like appearance is not satisfactorily explained.

No matter how deep into the unknown *Ghost Stories* plunged, one mundane element seemed inescapable: romance. Probably upwards of 97% of *Ghost Stories'* fiction involved the supernatural entanglements of chaste young lovers on their way to the altar or the bridal suite. Unrequited love beyond the grave was a frequent theme.

And very often, earthly love was spurned for the beckoning promise of bliss in the afterworld, as in C. H. MacLaury's "The Silver Moth" (April 1927). This was the tale of a young woman whose aviator fiancé disappears while flying his biplane, *The Silver Moth*. She gives him up for lost until a silver moth entices her to follow and she locates the plane's

wreckage and, briefly, her fiancé's ghost. The story ends as follows:

"There is nothing more to say—only this: I am learning to drive a plane, and I hope that some day I will own one of my own. If I ever do I will have it painted silver-grey, and I will name it *The Silver Moth*. And some dark, stormy windy night I shall fly up into the sky when the clouds are blackest, and lightning flashes brightest, and I'll bless the bolt that shatters a wing—if it will bring me the only happiness I will ever know—take me back to Dick, wherever he is."

Clearly, the *Ghost Stories* audience was just one step removed from that of *True Story* and the other MacFadden confession titles. And it was a giant step removed from *Weird Tales* and the other weird fiction magazines.

It was a bizarre formula, to be sure, but *Ghost Stories* sold well—for a time. And for a time, it was so popular that MacFadden added a companion title, *True Strange Stories*.

Identical in format, *True Strange Stories* ran a mixture of fiction and fact on odd, strange and sometimes supernatural occurrences. Ghosts were absent from its pages. A typical issue might carry an article on Death Valley Scotty, who was strange, but certainly not in the weird sense, or a story like "Why I Am Called a Witch," by Madeline Grover as told to Walter B. Gibson. Gibson, earlier the editor of the vaguely similar *Tales of Magic and Mystery*, later creator of *The Shadow*, edited *True Strange Stories* for most of its brief run. He also contributed "Can a Dog Have a Soul?" and "The Witch in the Next Room" to *Ghost Stories* around this time. *True Strange* debuted in March 1929, but was dead by year's end. Its premature demise might be laid to its emphasis on unusual fact articles like "The Pig That Cost a Hundred Lives" and "The Dog That Started a War." Only about ten per-

cent of its contents is identifiable as fiction. There were a few "as told to" stories and some serials, like F. M. Pettee's "The Bleeding Mummy," which concerned the remains of one Princess Amon-Ya, as well as unclassifiable shorts like "Was It a Man or Only a Head?" But even these were only borderline weird stories.

About the same time True Strange was killed, Ghost Stories suddenly turned into a pulp. It happened with the August 1928 issue. Gone were the photographs, and some of the dual bylines, although the covers remained the same. Bland. It underwent several format changes until MacFadden sold it early in 1930.

The buyer was an editor and publisher named Harold Hersey, a man who had an absolute genius for a losing proposition. Hersey also edited the magazine, spicing it up with eerie drawings and decorations which made Ghost Stories appear, to the untrained eye, as appealing to the same weird fiction aficionados as *Weird Tales*. But in reality not much had changed. New authors came in, including regular Jack D'Arcy, who would later leave Ghost Stories to write the adventures of another shade, The Phantom Detective. More *Weird Tales* writers appeared, including Paul Ernst, Carl Jacobi and Hugh B. Cave, but their contributions were slim. Besides, *Weird Tales* writers had been contributing since the beginning. Robert E. Howard had a story, "The Apparition in the Prize Ring," bylined John Taverel, in the April 1929 issue. (They later rejected his "John Grimalan's Debt," which was published in *Weird Tales* after Howard's death as "Dig Me No Grave.") Niczain Dyalhis, whose "When the Green Star Waned" was a *Weird Tales* classic, had a story in the May 1927 issue entitled "He Refused to Stay Dead." It had been announced under the title

"My Encounter with Orsic, the Troll" in the previous issue. The title change seemed definitely for the worse—but that was another Ghost Stories deficiency, stale titles. They were also careless. Innumerable stories were announced, only to appear with the title or byline changed—or not appear at all.

But what do you expect from a magazine that published stories like "The Thing That Paid the Rent"? I know lots of folks who wouldn't mind a ghost that helped out with the family budget that way.

Hersey had his hands full keeping Ghost Stories alive. Toward the last, he hired new cover artists to give the magazine a more modern, or Hallowe'en, look, and the final issues boasted Stuart Leach covers that remind one today of an aspiring Barnes Bok. But it was already too late for Ghost Stories. It died with the January 1932 issue, perhaps as much a victim of the Depression as of lagging sales.

Ghost Stories may have faded into oblivion, and Bernarr MacFadden may have joined the legion of double-exposure shades he published, but MacFadden's empire still endures. His pioneering titles, True Story and True Experiences, are still being published today. And Ghost Stories? Well, there have been a few reprint anthologies, such as *Prize Ghost Stories* and *True Twilight Tales*, which have kept its spirit shimmering. But the true spirit of Ghost Stories is alive today at your supermarket checkout counter. Just as back in the Twenties Ghost Stories once offered \$10,000 to any reader who could demonstrate that ghosts really do exist, not long ago its modern descendant offered an enormous sum to the first reader who proved UFO's really exist. Bernarr MacFadden would have loved The National Enquirer.

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